DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 322 CS 216 582

AUTHOR Smith, Carl B.
TITLE Improving Your Child's Writing Skills.
INSTITUTION Family Learning Association, Bloomington, IN.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 156p.
CONTRACT RR93002011
AVAILABLE FROM Family Learning Association, P.O. Box 5247, Bloomington, IN 47407; Tel: 800-759-4723 (Toll Free).
PUB TYPE Books (010) -- Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- ERIC Publications (071)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Learning Strategies; Parent Influence; Parent Participation; Parent Role; *Parents as Teachers; Teaching Methods; *Writing Improvement; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Intended for parents, this book offers straightforward directions on how to guide children in constructing a composition. It also helps parents review and clarify compositions that their children have already written. The book gives a developmental perspective to children's performance and includes sample compositions from actual classroom writing of children in grades 3-5. Chapters in the book are: (1) What Do Kids Write about in the Early Grades?; (2) Follow a Writing Process; (3) Prewriting: "How Do I Get Started?"; (4) Drafting: "How Do I Write the First Version?"; (5) Revising: "How Can I Improve What I've Written?"; (6) Proofreading: "How Can I Check for Mistakes?"; (7) Writing Descriptions; (8) Writing Letters; (9) Writing about Literature; and (10) Writing Stories. The book contains worksheets to give parent and child a thorough guide to improved writing, starting with early activity in the elementary grades. (CR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Improving Your Child's Writing Skills

Actual children's compositions make this a lively, practical guidebook for all ages!

CS 216582

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- [x] This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- [ ] Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC®
Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication

Carl B. Smith, Ph.D.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IMPROVING YOUR CHILD'S WRITING SKILLS

by Carl B. Smith, Ph.D.

Family Learning Association

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading,
English, and Communication

Copyright © 1999 by
Family Learning Association

Co-published by
ERIC Clearinghouse on
Reading, English, and Communication
Indiana University
Carl B. Smith, Director

ERIC (an acronym for **E**ducational **R**esources **I**nformation **C**enter) is a national network of 16 clearinghouses, each of which is responsible for building the ERIC database by identifying and abstracting various educational resources, including research reports, curriculum guides, conference papers, journal articles, and government reports. The Clearinghouse on **R**eading, **E**nglish, and **C**ommunication (ERIC/REC) collects educational information specifically related to reading, English, journalism, speech, and theater at all levels. ERIC/REC also covers interdisciplinary areas, such as media studies, reading and writing technology, mass communication, language arts, critical thinking, literature, and many aspects of literacy.

This publication was prepared with partial funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RR93002011. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgement in professional and technical matters. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Family Learning Association
P. O. Box 5247 Bloomington, IN 47407

The Family Learning Association is a not-for-profit organization devoted to providing resources to families and to teachers who encourage a family learning environment.

ERIC/REC Advisory Board

Elaine Aoki
Title I Coordinator,
Seattle Public Schools
Bush School
405 36th Avenue East
Seattle, WA 98103

Douglas Barnard
Associate Superintendent of Instruction
Mesa Public Schools
549 North Stapley Street
Mesa, AZ 85203

Neyland Clark
Superintendent, Kay County Schools
Cape Girardeau School District #63
61 North Clark
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

James Gaudino
Executive Director, National
Communication Association
5105 Backlick Road, Building E
Annandale, VA 22003

Earlene Holland
Associate Director, Office of
Program Development
251 East Ohio Street, Room 229,
State House
Indianapolis, IN 16204

Joan Irwin
Director of Publications,
International Reading Association
PO Box 8193
Newark, DE 19711

Robert Pavlik
Professor of English Education
Cardinal Stritch University
6801 North Yates Road
Milwaukee, WI 53217

Lenore Sandel
Editor, ASCD Whole
Language Newsletter
33 Sherman Avenue
Rockville Center, NY 11570

Faith Schullstrom
Executive Director, National Council of
Teachers of English
1111 W. Kenyon Road
Urbana, IL 61801

Josefina Tinajero
Director, Mother and Daughter Program
University of Texas
500 West University Avenue
El Paso, TX 79968

CONTENTS

Introduction vii

1. What Do Kids Write about in the Early Grades? 1

2. Follow a Writing Process 5

3. Prewriting: "How Do I Get Started?" 9

4. Drafting: "How Do I Write the First Version?" 23

5. Revising: "How Can I Improve What I've Written?" 31

6. Proofreading: "How Can I Check for Mistakes?" 45

7. Writing Descriptions 81

8. Writing Letters 91

9. Writing about Literature 107

10. Writing Stories 119

Index 151

INTRODUCTION

Parents are frequently asked to read their children's compositions or to guide their children in writing a report or a personal essay. Most parents that we have interviewed say that they are not sure what to do when their child asks: "Will you help me with this composition?"

Remembering their own school writing experiences, most parents answer that cry for help by correcting spelling or grammar. Beyond that they are not sure how to proceed. This book gives parents straightforward directions in how to guide their children in constructing a composition. It also helps them to review and clarify compositions that their children have already written.

The first step in helping children to improve is to see what other children write. Parents want to know what looks normal for the age of their children. This book gives you a developmental perspective to children's performance. All the sample compositions in this book come from the actual classroom writing of children in grades three through five. You will see the spelling and the grammar that children used in their original compositions, not to make fun of them but to help you appreciate the developmental stages of their writing.

You may of course read these chapters to answer the specific questions. By looking at the Table of Contents you may find a chapter that speaks to your present need. The worksheets in the book will help your child focus on the stages involved in writing a composition.

You may want to lead your child through the construction of a report or a story. For help in doing so, you will find help in chapters on the writing process, how to get started, and how to improve. These chapters discuss the thinking and writing activities that lead children from a vague idea to a clearly written statement. By following this writing process you not only help produce one good composition but also help establish a pattern of thinking that will serve your child in future projects.

Most importantly, this book works on the underlying theme that children must take responsibility for their own learning. Parents and teachers can organize learning experiences and can coach or tutor children. But the successful child is one who learns how to select among alternatives and finish a task. This book helps you channel your child's energies in becoming that kind of responsible writer.

Carl B. Smith

1

What Do Kids Write about in the Early Grades?

If you asked a child in elementary school to write a story, what would you expect to see? Here is an example by one third-grade student, with spelling and punctuation left exactly as it was in the original.

> Homework Excuses
> I didn't bring my homework because: My mom threw it out side and I tryed to catch it but it never came down. So I went and told mom but all she said was thats good. I said don't you like homework she said NO! Why? I just dont! OK! So I went back outside and I saw a bird came down and got it. The End.

This is typical for students in the early grades: an unbroken stream of sentences that tell what happened according to the "and then" format: First this happened, then that, then something else, and then something else. In spite of its obvious limitations, this paper does show that the student knows how to use language to tell an interesting short story.

As a parent, the first and most important thing for you to do is to pay attention to what the child is actually saying. Look beyond the misspellings and other mistakes; focus on the message rather than the mechanics. This third-grader has written an imaginative tale that actually contains quite a lot in a short space. The student obviously knows that a story starts with characters—Mom and me—who are involved in some sort of puzzling or interesting situation. In this

story we are presented with a problem: Disappearing Homework! The writer also tells of several events and reaches a conclusion of sorts. In spite of the obvious errors, there is much to praise and to build on in this story.

Here is a story by a fourth-grader. It, too, contains errors, but look at how inventive and mature it is!

There once was a bear named Walley. Walley was an ordanary bear with ordanary likeings. He liked honey and fruit. But best of all he liked makeing people happy. and the best way he new was wrighting letters. so Walley wrote a letter to Mr. Smith and it said.

Dear Mr. Smith,

It's your old friend Walley. I just woke up from hibernation back home in Sweat Valley forest.

I've missed you very, very much. I sure hope you can come home soon.

Your friend, Walley

But Walley hadden't any stamps and the post office was closed.

So he asked Mr. Kelly "the enginear" if he would take the letter And sure enough the letter got there on time. The End

This represents quite a large step beyond the third-grade story. This student has actually built the story around a letter, and has divided the whole story into paragraphs which help the reader considerably. The few misspellings and other errors can be dealt with later; the important thing is the effectiveness of the child's message.

By the fifth grade, students can write stories like this one (with spelling and punctuation unchanged):

Ralph and Ralph

In the back off my desk ralph mouse has a nest. Ralph rat lives in the garbage can of bus 52. Ralph mouse has a problem. He has to save Ralph rat from the wicked broom of Wanda the bus driver. Ralph mouse has asked me several times but I refused to help. Today he was determined to get me to help.

So today he came out of my desk and yelled at me he said, "Ask Joe tonight if you can ride home with him to save Ralph rat."

I told him. "I will bring you and drop you in the garbage can and tip the garbage over so you can get out."

"But we will fall down the steps if you kick the garbage can over. And then the bus will run me over," he said.

"If you want to get Ralph rat out you will have to take the chance of getting caught by the bus driver and getting tipped over in the garbage can."

"OK if I want to get Ralph I will have to do it," he said.

The next night Ralph and I went to Joe's house. I dropped Ralph in the garbage can. On the way off I tipped over the garbage can and they both ran out. That night when my mom came to pick me up she would not let me bring Ralph or Ralph home so Joe let me keep them at his house. He kept them in the top drore of his dresser and they have lived in Joe's house since then. But he never forgets to bring them to school once and a while.

This story is longer and more complex than the others. It even involves the characters in dialogue, and there are relatively few errors. This is what we would expect as children grow up.

Even though most students do improve as they move through the grades, their progress may be hit-or-miss. They may do something well in one story without really understanding what they did or how they did it.

What Can You Do?

There are many things you can do to help your child master writing skills. You can show how to follow guidelines, to improve the organization of a story, and to correct spelling and punctuation errors that might cause problems for the reader. Most importantly, these skills are valuable not only for telling stories and writing letters but also for learning and remembering what is studied in content areas.

The most important thing you can do is to make your child aware that writing can be approached in a logical, step-by-step manner. It's never necessary to be "stumped" or to say, "I don't know what to write about!"

You and your child need to think of writing as a *process*. There are ways to get started, ways to come up with ideas to write about, ways to sketch out a first draft, and ways to improve each composition and make it clear enough for readers to understand. The purpose of this book is to show you and your child how to do all these things so that they can be applied in every writing project. In each chapter you will find practice activities and worksheets to help reach this goal.

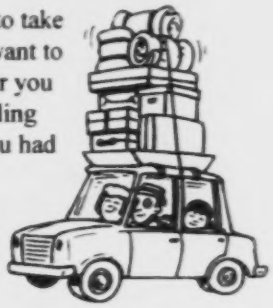
Chapters 2–6 take you through the writing process, step by step. You will see how to help your child sketch out ideas and thoughts in the early stages, how to write a first draft, and how to revise each paper and correct all errors that might trip the reader.

In Chapter 2 you will find out what the writing process is and what is involved in each step. Chapters 3–6 elaborate on these steps, giving you information and providing examples. The goal is to prepare you to help your child follow a logical procedure in writing original compositions of all types. You can use the practice exercises to find out what your child needs to know. Work on these exercises with your child if you think it is appropriate.

The principles discussed in Chapters 2–6 will then be put to use in the remaining chapters. There you will find examples of compositions of various types, all written by students. You and your child will be able to see what other students do and will also be able to practice revising and proofreading the work of others. This experience will help your child approach any writing project with confidence and a clear idea of how to go about it in a logical way.

2

Follow a Writing Process.



What would you do if you were getting ready to take a trip? You would probably make a list of things you want to take. You would plan your route if you were driving, or you would make arrangements for tickets if you were traveling some other way. You would also want to make sure you had reservations for places to stay.

When you write any kind of composition—a letter, a story, a report about a book you've read—you can follow a logical process that carries you from the first step to the finished product. (When we say *you*, we mean you and your child. Try to be a coach and a mutual learner with your child.) This process can be outlined in five steps.

1. Prewriting

The first step involves *planning*. Begin by jotting down ideas about topics you might want to develop into complete compositions. This is the time to think about what you want to do and who your reader might be. You are not concerned with the finished composition at this point; you are just looking for ideas to write about. Chapter 3 will talk more fully about this important stage of the process.

2. Drafting

After you have picked a topic, you begin to put your ideas down on paper. For the first draft, you don't have to worry about the exact order of your ideas or about spelling and grammar. The important thing is to start getting some thoughts on paper, in complete sentences. This will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3. Revising

After your first draft is completed, look back over it to see if it says what you want it to. Most writers, even experienced professionals, find that their first attempt is not quite what they want it to be. However, they don't just recopy what they have already written, and they don't worry about small mechanical errors that can be fixed later. They set out to make their writing better by changing the content so that their story is made more interesting for the reader.

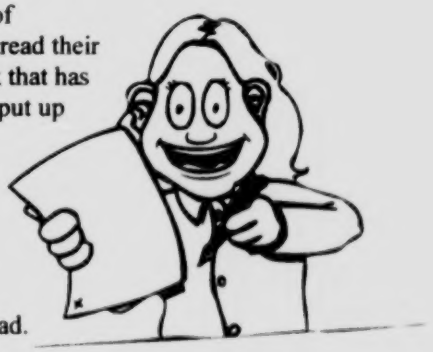
When you revise your composition, feel free to change words or sentences, rearrange the order of things, and add or delete material so that your writing will be clear and will make the reader want to follow your story to the end. Writers often revise their work several times as they search for the best way to express their ideas. We will talk about this in Chapter 5.

4. Proofreading

When you have revised your composition so that it is clear and interesting, you need to check carefully for any mistakes that may have slipped by. Spelling is the first thing to check; look up any words you aren't sure about to make certain they are spelled correctly. This is most important if the reader is going to understand what you have written. Also make sure each sentence begins with a capital and ends with a period or question mark or exclamation mark. Finally, check the meaning of each sentence to make sure that grammar is correct. We will talk more about all of these concerns in Chapter 6.

5. Publishing

Children will feel a great sense of accomplishment when others are able to read their compositions and appreciate all the work that has gone into them. At home, a story can be put up on the refrigerator or a bulletin board, and copies can be mailed to relatives. In school, compositions can be posted so that other students can read them. Always help your child work toward a finished product: a composition that is written clearly and neatly for others to read.



Also keep in mind one other important point. After your child has completed a story or other composition and you've put it on the refrigerator or bulletin board, be sure to acknowledge the effort and reward the achievement. Even a note at the top of the page can mean a great deal: "Good story!" or "I like this one a lot!" Remember: Your child is just learning how to make it all work. Learning to write is not easy. It takes a lot of time and practice, and it should be encouraged at every stage.

Reward your child for making progress,
not for achieving perfection.

3

Prewriting: "How Do I Get Started?"

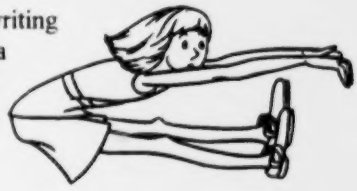
If you plan to run in a marathon, you don't go out one day and start running as fast as you can for as long as you can. Instead, you stretch and warm up carefully, begin with short distances, and gradually build the endurance needed to complete a long race.

In a way, writers take a similar approach. Writing requires preparation and practice over a long period of time. Before you can write a complete composition that is well organized and interesting to the reader, you have to develop the necessary skills, gradually and with lots of practice. As with running or any other activity, the preparation is just as important as anything else. That's where we should begin.

> HINT
>
> When you begin looking for a topic to write about, imagine you are a bird flying overhead. You circle 'round and 'round, looking at everything below, trying to find your target—food, if you're a bird. Jot down ideas as they come to mind: What things do I like? What subjects do I know about? What happened recently that I could write about? In this way, you can gather ideas that can be developed into complete compositions.

In all the following sections, keep in mind one important thing: Your child will be much more interested in doing these exercises if *you* do them, too. By writing yourself and talking about ideas with your child, you show that writing is important to you. There is no better way to motivate your child and ensure that the effort spent on writing is successful.

What Is Prewriting?



Prewriting is just what it sounds like: writing that you do at the very beginning as a warmup, a kind of "stretching exercise." It lets you try out different ideas and jot down thoughts as they come to mind, before you actually begin to work on the composition itself.

In this first step of the writing process, you aren't concerned with the final "product." For the moment, you don't have to worry about all the mechanics of spelling or sentence structure. Instead, you are simply looking for ideas and searching for a topic to write about. Later, as you revise and refine your composition, you can attend to the important details that make your writing clear and interesting to the reader.

You can use prewriting to help organize your thoughts into a logical sequence. You are engaged in a search for ideas and you are trying out different ways of organizing those ideas. You should take advantage of this early exploratory phase to jot down anything that comes to mind. As we go along, you will see how to begin organizing your random thoughts into a more coherent pattern.

On the following pages we will suggest a few approaches that you can follow during this early phase of writing. Try these ideas along with your child; it will help you realize what is involved in looking for topics and beginning to organize your thoughts.

Focused Freewriting

In the broadest sense, "freewriting" means writing about *anything* that comes to mind: the pizza you ate (or shouldn't have eaten), the lousy weather, the great weather, the vacation you're looking forward to, and so on. In order to be of the greatest value to your child, however, it would be best to begin with *focused freewriting*: writing about a specific topic or thought, preferably one that your child chooses. (If your child can't think of a topic you can suggest one, but let your child select the topic whenever possible.)

Once you and your child have decided on a topic, you can talk about personal experiences that relate to it. You might talk about a trip you took, a visit to the zoo or museum or to a ball game, a big snowstorm, or anything else. After you have talked for a while, encourage your child to write down the ideas that have come to mind. These ideas can provide lots of material for the composition that can emerge as you work through the process.

In all of these activities, be sure you don't "talk yourself out" on any particular topic. The goal is to have your child *write* as many ideas and memories as possible; these will provide the basis for everything that is done in the future.

Use the suggestions on the following page to help you get started. In each case, just write down anything that comes to mind; you can organize your thoughts later. Make more copies of this page if you like.

Suggestions for Focused Freewriting

Topic _____

Make brief notes about the topic you choose. Just jot down some main points here so you can develop them more fully later on.

- Write any related idea.

- Write about something that happened recently.

- Try to remember ideas from the past. Include as many specific details as you can.

- List anything you want to know about the topic.

Lists

An especially good way to think of ideas for topics is to make lists. These can be lists of subjects that interest your child, things that are fun to do, things your child has accomplished, favorite foods or games, or anything else. Lists can be combined with focused freewriting as well. If your child writes about something that happened yesterday or a week ago, he or she can jot down lists of important words that relate to the incident. These will help when the time comes to write more extensively about what happened.

You can also use lists when you start to think about a general topic such as school, travel, family, or friends. You and your child can both write down events and memories that relate to the topic. After you have finished, share the items on your lists. Your child may have remembered things you forgot, and vice versa. Finally, you can help your child decide which memory or experience provides the best topic to write about.

There is another important benefit that comes from making lists. Often a child will pick a very broad topic such as sports or school. Once you begin to list significant words that relate to this broad topic, it is likely that a more specific event or idea will emerge. This is the topic to write about because it is focused and more manageable than a broad, vague subject. Furthermore, a specific event will probably have a beginning, a middle, and an end—so the structure of your story is already laid out for you.

Use the outline on the next page as a guide. Pick a specific topic and then list the words and ideas that relate to that topic. Make more copies of this page if you like.

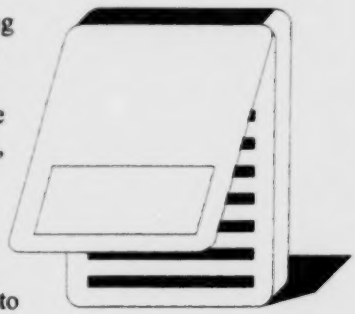
Making Lists

Topic _____

Specific words and ideas:

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Journals



One of the best ways to practice writing and to gather a storehouse of ideas is to keep a journal. This can be a simple record of what happened each day: what your child saw on the way to school, how things looked after a storm, what you are daydreaming about or looking forward to, and so on. A journal can also be used to jot down ideas and thoughts as they occur. Children normally wouldn't think of writing these things, but there is no better way to keep track of events and ideas that can later be developed into a story or a letter or any other kind of composition.

Journals are especially valuable because they provide a way to capture impressions and experiences on the spot. How does something look or taste or smell at a particular moment? How did it feel to do something fun or exciting? Can you remember all these details a day or a week later? Probably not, but a journal can be used to capture these memories and feelings right away so they can be used for a story or poem later on.

You can help your child by giving "trigger words" that can be used for journal writing and for developing story ideas. Suggest a word, such as a color or a place or an event, and have your child write about some memory that is triggered by that word: what it felt like to go to the zoo, what you remember about a visit to grandma's, and so on.

If children have made a habit of writing often in their journals, they can look back and read through until they find an entry that they would like to develop further. In addition to helping suggest ideas, journal writing also gives your child a chance to practice writing without pressure or restrictions. This practice helps develop fluency and makes your child feel comfortable with writing, especially when it is used to remember things and to play with ideas.

A sample journal for a week is given on the next page. Make as many copies as you like.

My Journal

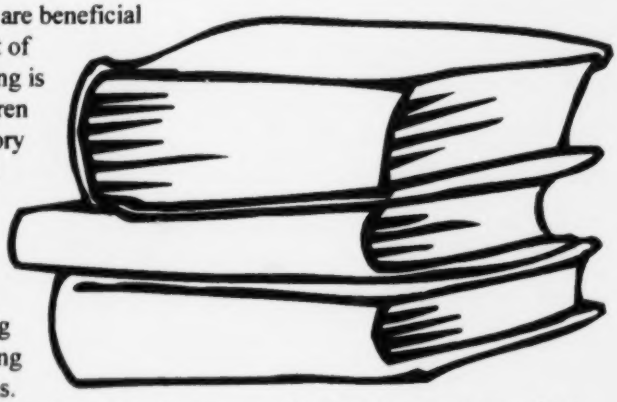
Week of _____

- Monday
- Tuesday
- Wednesday
- Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday
- Sunday

Writing about What You Have Read

After you and your child have read the same story or poem or play, talk about it and see how many themes you can think of. For instance, an adventure story might involve a long journey through unfamiliar territory, bravery and persistence under difficult circumstances, or ingenuity in dealing with surprising situations. When you have talked about these ideas, suggest that your child write *another* story based on the same theme.

Other possibilities can be developed along these lines. Your child might choose one of the characters or a particular situation and then write an original story about it. Another approach would be to compare and contrast a character in one story with a character in another story.



These activities are beneficial for several reasons. First of all, they show that reading is an *active* process. Children can use the ideas in a story as the starting points for new stories of their own. Also, children often show greater insight into a story or a character through writing about it than by answering comprehension questions. Finally, by reading and listening to good literature, children become increasingly aware of what good writing can be. Reading improves writing, and writing improves reading.

Your child can use the worksheet on the next page to jot down ideas while reading. A few possibilities are suggested; your child can add more as they come up. Make more copies of the worksheet if you like. In Chapter 9 we will talk about this subject in more detail.

Worksheet

Book Title: _____

Author: _____

- I liked:

- I didn't like:

- Who were the main characters?

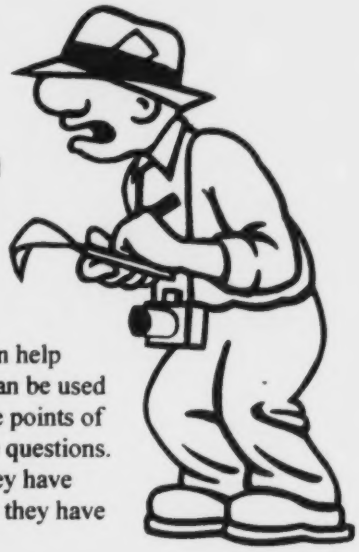
- What were the most important things that happened?

- Would you recommend this book to someone else?

Five W's and One H

One set of guidelines is particularly helpful in writing a report; the same guidelines can also be used to practice prewriting. This approach is called the "Five W's," referring to the questions often used by news reporters to guide them as they gather information. In addition, a "how" question is often helpful as well:

- **Who** did something?
- **What** did they do?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen?



These questions can help your child analyze and understand what he or she has read. After your child has read something, he or she can go back over it and look for the answers to these questions.

In the same way, these questions can help your child organize original writing. They can be used as a prewriting activity because they provide points of focus: stories can be organized around these questions. Children can do this more successfully if they have already used this approach to analyze things they have read.

After reading a story your child can use the worksheet on the next page to jot down answers to the questions.

Worksheet

Use this worksheet to write about things that happen to you or things that happen in stories you read.

- WHO did something?

- WHAT happened?

- WHEN did it happen?

- WHERE did it happen?

- WHY did it happen?

- HOW did it happen?

Looping

After your child has become comfortable with the idea of using prewriting strategies to think about ideas and develop topics for complete compositions, you might suggest one more approach.

In this activity, your child writes steadily for two or three minutes about a specific topic. The idea is to jot down anything that comes to mind, just so long as it relates to the topic.

At the end of this first loop of time, your child stops and reads what has been written. The purpose is to find a particular thought or idea that can be used as the theme for further writing.

After a word or phrase has been chosen from the first loop, it should be used in a sentence at the beginning of another loop of time: two or three more minutes on the new topic. At the end of this loop, repeat the process at least once more.

Out of these three loops, your child should be able to find a central idea that can be developed into a complete story or composition. You will often find that these "warming up" exercises create a positive atmosphere and lead your child directly into a more sustained effort that leads to a complete first draft.

All of these prewriting activities provide opportunities for practice, and the more writing children do, the better writers they will become. Furthermore, these activities allow children to write from personal experience, thus building confidence in their ability to write.

Helping Your Child Get Started

Use the ideas in this chapter to help your child jot down topics and thoughts that can be developed into compositions. The important thing now is just to write down every idea, no matter how brief or fragmentary. Then these ideas can be developed and expanded and improved using the information given in the rest of this book.

Use the worksheet on the following page to help your child keep track of ideas as they appear.

Journal Page for Ideas

- From TV or Movies:

- From School:

- From Friends:

- From Reading:

4

Drafting: "How Do I Write the First Version?"

After a topic has been chosen, you and your child should begin the first attempt to write connected ideas. It is important for your child to realize that this is still the *beginning* of the process. Children often think that once they have written their story or composition, they are finished. Help your child understand that writing a good composition involves a process which has several steps.

If your child is just beginning to write longer compositions or has shown little interest in writing in the past, then approach all the suggestions in this book with care and sensitivity. Don't stress the process of revising or proofreading during this drafting stage. It is not necessary to correct every error in a paper written by a third-grader. Most children improve considerably in spelling and grammar as they progress through the grades, so keep this in mind as you work together.

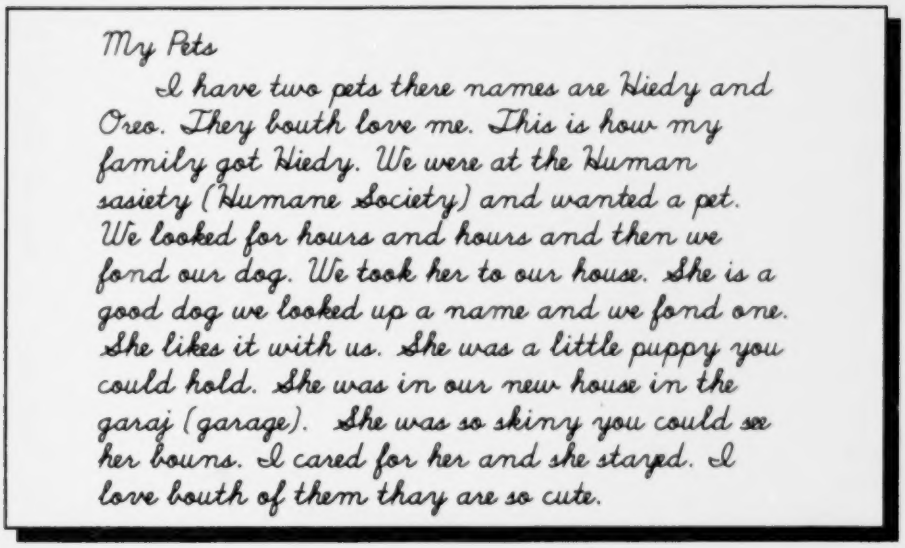
The examples in this chapter will give you a good idea of what children write in their first drafts of compositions. At the end of the chapter you will find a page entitled "Writing the First Draft." Use the suggestions on that page to help your child get started.

Student Writing in the Early Grades

We will begin by looking at some compositions written by students in grades three, four, and five. In this chapter, examples of student writing will not be revised in an way. Occasionally a corrected spelling will be given in brackets to facilitate understanding, but that is all. The goal here is to see what students actually write in their first drafts.

Grade Three

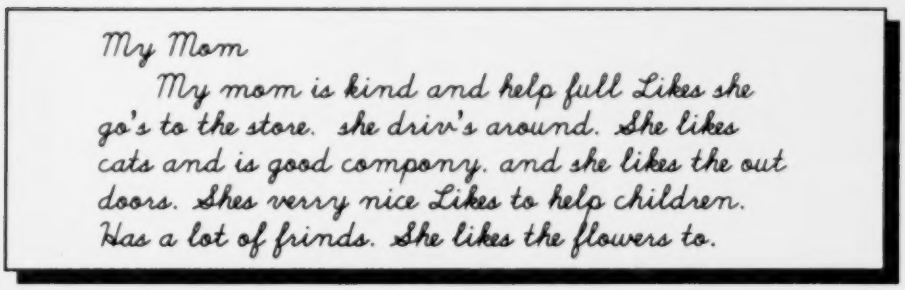
Here are two papers written by third-grade students. The first is typical of what children write about at this age: family, friends, pets, school, and so on. They also like to make up stories at any age, as we will see in later chapters.



My Pets

I have two pets there names are Hiedy and Oreo. They bouth love me. This is how my family got Hiedy. We were at the Human sasietry (Humane Society) and wanted a pet. We looked for hours and hours and then we fond our dog. We took her to our house. She is a good dog we looked up a name and we fond one. She likes it with us. She was a little puppy you could hold. She was in our new house in the garaj (garage). She was so skinny you could see her bouns. I cared for her and she stayed. I love bouth of them thay are so cute.

The second paper may be full of errors, but it is a sincere expression of something that is important to the writer.



My Mom

My mom is kind and help full Likes she go's to the store. she driv's around. She likes cats and is good compony. and she likes the out doors. Shes verry nice Likes to help children. Has a lot of frinds. She likes the flowers to.

Focus on the *message* the child is trying to convey. Sound out the odd spellings and they usually approximate the right word; sort out the run-on

sentences and they usually make sense. The errors can be dealt with later; that's what revising and proofreading are for.

Grade Four

The first paper by a fourth-grade student shows what can be done when children write about topics that really interest them.

Indangered Animals in America

Indangered animals must be helped from becoming extinct. I like what America is doing to help these animals the animals I've heard of just about becoming extinct are Florida flamingo, brown bear (in most states) those are just a very few of the animals. I am proud to see that America is doing something by breading these animals, protecting eggs and the young, finding if the animals go to the same place during mating season, finding food for these animals, and finding out who their enimies are.
American is doing alot to help animals that are in danger of becoming extinct. I've been trying to help these animals by donating money. It makes me sad to think of animals in other contries that are not being helped. I am content to be in a contry that does. It makes me realy happy to know America realy cares enough to help these animals.

The second paper was written simply to express the child's feelings, without even knowing who might read it.

A Pet I love

My dog's name is Toasty. He's a Lasa Opso (Lhasa Apso). He's ten years old, but in dog age he's 70! He's very sick and hes not going to live much longer.

Since hes sufering and is very old My family and I have desided to put him to slep. I fel very sad and unhappy about it but if he could comunacate he would probably want the same thing to happen because he sufering very much and he's in alot of pain.

I'm still really sad. I had him since I was little. Theres an operation for him but he may not live through that either.

Even though I'm unhappy it still has to be done, but the good thing is that I always have memories about him and he'll never die.

This is what we mean by encouraging your child to write about something important to him or her.

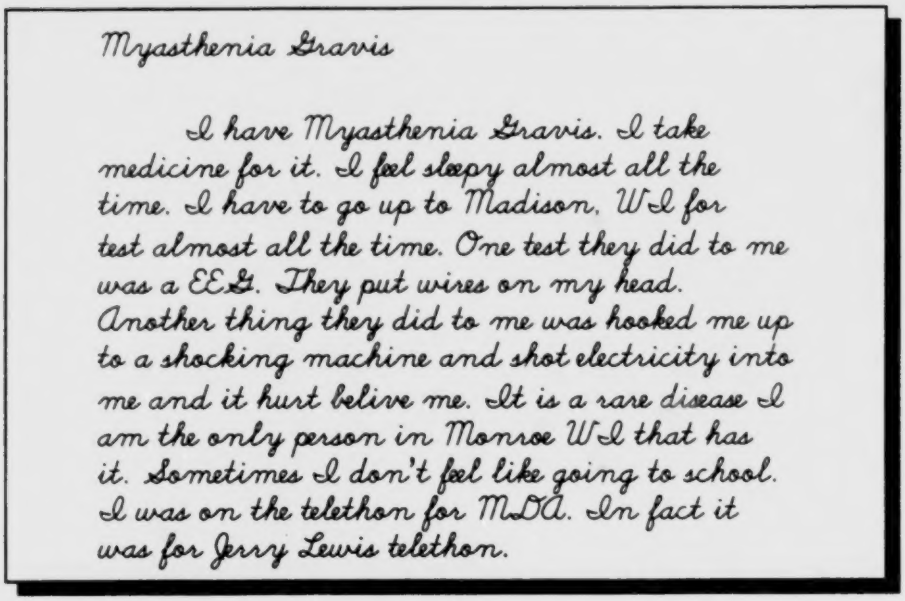
Grade Five

The first paper by a fifth-grade student shows a very imaginative use of language, even if the sentences do run on a bit. That's typical in the elementary grades.

Fun Things

One of my goals (goals) in life is to be a writer my mother says I have a good emaganation (imagination). Most of my books I write are about how I feel and what I like to do in fact I just wrote one recently it's called "The Dream Date" it's a really fun book well at least my mother likes it most of my stories people die in I don't know why its probluly becase if thay stay alive the storie gets boring otherwise. I only like to write short stories because there (they're) more creative and you can do enything you whant. Its like your (you're) in controlle and you have to decide what happens next I really injoy writing but sometimes you get so involved with the sitchuashation (situation) you just kep on writting and can't stop becase you whant to know what happens next. I also like to ride my bike that I got for Christmas its big very big its a ten speed. My mothers always saying act your age not your shoe size but I can't becase I take size ten and I'm ten years old so thats fun!

The last paper shows another student discussing a subject of extreme importance.



Myasthenia Gravis

I have Myasthenia Gravis. I take medicine for it. I feel sleepy almost all the time. I have to go up to Madison, WI for test almost all the time. One test they did to me was a EEG. They put wires on my head. Another thing they did to me was hooked me up to a shocking machine and shot electricity into me and it hurt belive me. It is a rare disease I am the only person in Monroe WI that has it. Sometimes I don't feel like going to school. I was on the telethon for MDA. In fact it was for Jerry Lewis telethon.

For now, just look at these compositions as examples of what kids typically do in the early grades. In the next two chapters we will look at some of these compositions again and see how they could be improved through revision and proofreading.

Helping Your Child Write the First Draft

After looking at these examples, encourage your child to write first drafts without stopping to worry over every sentence. The point is to get something down on paper; then we will see how to improve it.

Use the worksheet on the next page to help your child develop the first draft of a composition about a topic of interest. These guidelines can help to develop a logical sequence.

Writing the First Draft

Topic _____

- At the beginning, the reader needs to know this:

- Here are the important things I want to say:

- At the end, I want to be sure to say this:

5

Revising: "How Can I Improve What I've Written?"

All the papers you saw in the preceding chapter had spelling mistakes and garbled sentences. They also tended to be written as long paragraphs in which all the information was strung out in an unbroken series of sentences. That's to be expected—after all, they were first drafts by elementary school students.

In this chapter we will look back at some of those papers to see how they might be revised. Approach this chapter with your child's own abilities and stage of development in mind. If you just point out a few things and make your child aware that it's a good idea to revise the first draft, that may be enough for now.

What Happens When You Revise Something?

When you begin to revise your writing, you want to focus on the big picture. You want to make sure that the overall organization of your composition is as clear as possible; small technical details can be dealt with later.

Here are big-picture questions to consider as you revise the first draft of any composition you write:

- Are the ideas in a clear order? Should I move some sentences around so that they are better organized?
- Do I need to expand some sections to explain more fully?
- Do I need to get rid of some material that is repetitious or that doesn't contribute to the topic of my composition?
- Have I organized my composition into paragraphs?

Your primary concern is to make the whole composition clearer and more interesting for the reader.

This brings up an important idea that your child should always keep in mind:

> Remember that you are writing to convey your ideas and thoughts to *someone else* who must be able to read and understand what you are writing. This is why revising and proofreading are so important. *You* may know just what you want to say, but you must help *others* understand it, too.

If compositions are full of mistakes and are not well organized, they are difficult to read and understand even though the topic may be interesting. Discuss the importance of making sure that the reader can always understand what is written. One way to make this point is to look at the original versions of some of the student compositions in this book. Gradually your child will realize how hard it is to understand writing that is not well organized.

The Importance of Paragraph Structure

You have seen that some of the student compositions consisted of an unbroken string of sentences, with no organization that the reader can grasp.

In the early grades, children do not usually think of arranging a composition into paragraphs; they just churn out the story as fast as they can, as though they were telling it to someone. However, when we write something, we must take care to present it on the page in a way that guides the reader.

You can begin to help your child see the value of paragraphs if you mention the following points whenever appropriate.

Paragraphs

Generally, a paragraph contains several sentences that focus on a single topic. Here is the format usually recommended for paragraphs:

- A topic sentence or a lead sentence that tells what the paragraph is about.
- The body of the paragraph gives some details about the topic.
- A closing sentence that is often a reminder of what the topic sentence was about.

This abstract, "ideal" paragraph structure is often taught in textbooks, and it can be of some value as a general guide. However, it is important to be flexible, especially with young children, and let each individual situation determine how to organize paragraphs. You might just suggest some general guidelines such as these:

Begin a new paragraph when

- something important happens,
- the scene changes,
- a new character enters the story, or
- a different person speaks.

It is also customary to begin a new paragraph when each character speaks. We will talk about this later when we deal with the use of quotation marks in dialogue.

At the end of this chapter you will find a section entitled "Working on Your Child's Compositions." This gives a general summary of the points discussed in this chapter. You will also find a page entitled "Guidelines for Revising Compositions." Make copies of this page if you like; use it to look for the most important points as you revise compositions.

One word of caution: When you talk about revising anything, always keep your child's stage of development in mind. With young children, it may not be helpful to pursue the idea of revision in great detail, especially if your child is just beginning to feel comfortable with writing in the first place. It may be best to make a few general observations and then move on. For example, you might say, "This paper talks about elephants at the beginning. Then it talks about other animals and comes back to elephants at the end. It might be good to bring all of the information about elephants together."

The major question for revising a composition is: *"Is it clear?"*

Revising Student Compositions

On the following pages you will encounter some of the papers given in Chapter 4. The goal here is to see how these papers could be improved by rearranging ideas and grouping them into paragraphs. Each paper is given first in its original form with all errors unchanged; then we suggest a few ways to improve its organization.

Grade Three

Reread the following third-grade composition about "My Pets." As you go through this paper with your child, you can discuss these important questions:

- Is this clear?
- Are these sentences in the best order?
- Should related bits of information be grouped into individual paragraphs?
- Can anything be cut out?

Now have your child mark changes as you read this story together.

My Pets

I have two pets there names are Hiedy and Oreo. They bouth love me. This is how my family got Hiedy. We were at the Human sasiety and wanted a pet. We looked for hours and hours and then we fond our dog. We took her to our house. She is a good dog we looked up a name and we fond one. She likes it with us. She was a little puppy you could hold. She was in our new house in the garaj. She was so skiny you could see her bouns. I cared for her and she stayed. I love bouth of them thay are so cute.

As you see, there is only one "paragraph." This is typical of many papers written in the early grades. It means that there is a lot of information that rattles on without a break. The reader could understand this composition better if this long paragraph were broken into shorter ones, each with its own focus. In the following revision, we have changed the *order* of sentences and grouped them into paragraphs. Spelling will be corrected later.

My Pets

I have two pets there names are Hiedy and Oreo. They bouth love me.

This is how my family got Hiedy. We were at the Human sasiety and wanted a pet. We looked for hours and hours and then we fond our dog. We took her to our house.

She was in our new house in the garaj. She was a little puppy you could hold. She was so skiny you could see her bouns. I cared for her and she stayed.

She is a good dog we looked up a name and we fond one. She likes it with us. I love bouth of them thay are so cute.

Compare this with the original to see how it has been revised. Some younger children may not understand the importance of these changes, but they will appreciate them more as they gain practice in writing and revising their own compositions. Your child may have marked some of the misspellings, and that's good. We didn't change misspellings here, but we will discuss them in the next chapter.

Grade Four

Here is a fourth-grade composition, given without any corrections. Encourage your child to mark places that she would change to make it easier to follow.

Indangered Animals in America

Indangered animals must be helped from becoming extinct. I like what America is doing to help these animals the animals I've heard of just about becoming extinct are Florida flamingo, brown bear (in most states) those are just a very few of the animals. I am proud to see that America is doing something by breeding these animals, protecting eggs and the young, finding if the animals go to the same place during mating season, finding food for these animals, and finding out who their enimies are. America is doing alot to help animals that are in danger of becoming extinct. I've been trying to help these animals by donating money. It makes me sad to think of animals in other contries that are not being helped. I am content to be in a contry that does. It makes me realy happy to know America realy cares enough to help these animals.

Ask your child to mark places where paragraphs might begin. One good way to revise this composition would be to approach it as a series of questions. Then, each question could be answered in its own paragraph. (Of course, you may have thought of some other questions of your own).

1. What does the term "endangered animals" mean? The author doesn't say, so we will have to add that information.

2. What are some examples of endangered animals? The author does give some examples, so these could be discussed in one paragraph.

3. What can be done to save endangered animals? The author also says quite a bit about this, so it would make a good paragraph of its own.

4. Finally, what is the author's personal interest in this topic? We can end the composition by using the last four sentences in a paragraph that tells why the writer is concerned about endangered animals.

Using these four questions as our guide, we can now organize this composition much more clearly. A small amount of new information has been added in brackets, and a few sentences have been deleted. Discuss this revision with your child, allowing for the possibility that there are other ways to do it.

Indangered Animals in America

[Many animal species become extinct because they are all killed or their living space is destroyed.] Indangered animals must be helped from becoming extinct, [and there are many things we all can do].

[In America, some of] the animals I've heard of just about becoming extinct are Florida flamingo [and] brown bear (in most states). Those are just a very few of the animals.

I am proud to see that America is doing something by breeding these animals, protecting eggs and the young, finding if the animals go to the same place during mating season, finding food for these animals, and finding out who their enimies are.

I've been trying to help these animals by donating money. It makes me sad to think of animals in other contries that are not being helped. I am content to be in a contry that does. It makes me realy happy to know America realy cares enough to help these animals.

Grade Five

The following fifth-grade composition is interesting and imaginative, but it is difficult to follow because ideas are run together without any kind of grouping that the eye can detect. After you and your child read it, ask your child to mark paragraphs as a first step in revising this composition.

Fun Things

One of my goels in life is to be a writer my mother says I have a good emaganation. Most of my books I write are about how I feel and what I like to do in fact I just wrote one recently it's called "The Dream Date" it's a really fun book well at least my mother likes it most of my stories people die in I don't know why its probluly becase if thay stay alive the storie gets boring otherwise. I only like to write short stories because there more creative and you can do enything you whant. It's like your in controlle and you have to decide what happens next I really injoy writing but sometimes you get so involved with the sitchuashation you just keep on writting and can't stop becase you whant to know what happens next. I also like to ride my biike that I got for Christmas its big very big its a ten speed. My mothers always saying act your age not you shoe size but I can't becase I take size ten and I'm ten years old so thats fun!

Although this topic is very general ("Fun Things"), it deals mostly with the author's interest in writing. Even so, there are a few places that suggest breaks. Can you find some of these spots? Also notice that the writer introduces a new subject near the end. This would obviously suggest a new paragraph.

Here is a possible revision that groups related ideas so that the eye can grasp them more readily. Discuss this revision with your child. Spelling will be corrected later.

Fun Things

One of my goels in life is to be a writer my mother says I have a good emaganation.

Most of my books I write are about how I feel and what I like to do in fact I just wrote one recently it's called "The Dream Date" it's a really fun book well at least my mother likes it.

most of my stories people die in I don't know why its probluly becase if thay stay alive the storie gets boring otherwise. I only like to write short stories because there more creative and you can do enything you whant. It's like your in controlle and you have to decide what happens next.

I really injoy writing but sometimes you get so involved with the sitchuashation you just keep on writting and can't stop becase you whant to know what happens next.

I also like to ride my biike that I got for Christmas its big very big its a ten speed. My mothers always saying act your age not you shoe size but I can't becase I take size ten and I'm ten years old so thats fun!

A New Example for Revision

The following paper by a fourth-grade student contains much interesting information, but it is not organized very clearly. Read it with your child and talk about what you might do to revise it. Use the ideas you saw in the earlier examples to rearrange the information and organize it into paragraphs that the reader can understand more readily.

The Koala

A koala is a small Australian animal resmbling a teddy bear It is called the Australian bear, pouched bear, and native sloth, but it is neither a bear nor a sloth. In its slow-moving life in the trees it resebles a sloth. The koala is a marsupial (a mammal that has a pouch for carrying its young.) The koala is about 24 inches long and 12 inches high at the shoulder, and has only a suggestion of a tail. Its thick, soft, wooly fur is ash-gray above and yellowish white below. It has a thick head, a short snout, and its mouth has cheek pouches. The koala often hangs in trees with its bake downward, like a sloth. It can grasp the branches easily with its long toes. It sleeps during the day in the top of a blue gum (eucalyptus) tree. The koala feeds only on eucalyptus leaves and buds. The koala mother carries her young cub in her pouch for several months. After the cub grows old enough, it rides on her bake. The koala is a defenseless animal. Until recently, hunters killed great numbers of the animals for their warm, soft fur.

Basically, this composition is very good as it stands. The sentences are clear, and there are only a few misspelled words. The only problems are caused by the fact that everything is strung out in one long paragraph and ideas are not always grouped as clearly as they might be.

As you saw earlier, a good way to revise any paper is to list the major topics that *are* covered. After you have done this, you can present each topic as a question. Then your revised composition can answer each question in its own paragraph.

- What is a koala?
- What does it look like?
- How does it live?
- How does it care for its young?

Before you look at the following comments, you may want to write your own revision on a separate piece of paper.

Improving the preceding paper

Now, using the writer's own words, we can organize this composition into several paragraphs, each dealing with a specific bit of information about koalas.

> *Each paragraph should focus on a single topic, which should be stated in the first sentence if possible.*

This paper lends itself to paragraphs with topic sentences, as you will see in the following revision. We have also corrected the few spelling errors to make this paper easier to read.

The Koala

A koala is a small Australian animal resembling a teddy bear. It is called the Australian bear, pouched bear, and native sloth, but it is neither a bear nor a sloth. The koala is a defenseless animal. Until recently, hunters killed great numbers of the animals for their warm, soft fur.

In its slow-moving life in the trees it resembles a sloth. The koala is about 24 inches long and 12 inches high at the shoulder, and has only a suggestion of a tail. Its thick, soft, wooly fur is ash-gray above and yellowish-white below. It has a thick head, a short snout, and its mouth has cheek pouches.

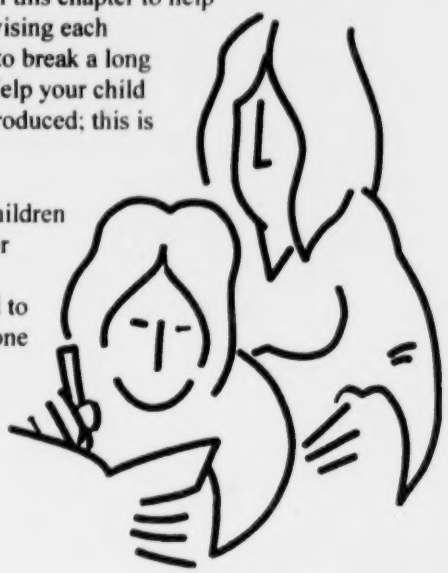
The koala often hangs in trees with its back downward, like a sloth. It can grasp the branches easily with its long toes. It sleeps during the day in the top of a blue gum (eucalyptus) tree. The koala feeds only on eucalyptus leaves and buds.

The koala is a marsupial (a mammal that has a pouch for carrying its young). The koala mother carries her young cub in her pouch for several months. After the cub grows old enough, it rides on her back.

Ideally, this composition should end with another paragraph that provides a summary or conclusion. However, the revision we have made does improve the organization and readability considerably, compared to the original version.

Working on Your Child's Compositions

Use the ideas and examples in this chapter to help your child understand the need for revising each composition. Often it will be enough to break a long paragraph into several shorter ones. Help your child decide when a new topic has been introduced; this is the spot to begin a new paragraph.



Also, don't expect younger children to be able to see all the possibilities for revision; they probably believe that they've already said what they wanted to say. Just remind your child that someone else must read each paper, so it is important to group ideas into paragraphs and to separate the paragraphs so that others can understand them.

The guidelines on the next page can be used with each composition your child revises, whether an example in this book or an original effort.

Guidelines for Revising Compositions

Use the following questions to revise a composition, either an original work or someone else's. Make notes here in addition to any marks you make on the composition itself.

1. Is this composition clear and easy to read?

2. What are the good points? Why?

3. What spots are not clear? Circle each problem area so you can correct it when you write a revision.

4. What sections need to be eliminated? Cross them out.

5. What sections need to be improved by adding more information? Circle them and add the information.

6

Proofreading: "How Can I Check for Mistakes?"

So far we have talked about the value of revising compositions: arranging ideas in logical order and using separate paragraphs that focus on individual topics. After the revision process is complete, the composition should be checked once more to make sure there are no technical errors. This process is called *proofreading*.

> When you proofread, you look through a composition to see if there are misspelled words, incorrect punctuation, or poor grammar. This is the time to correct these errors so that the reader can understand your composition easily.

In the first part of this chapter we will illustrate the most typical mistakes. This will give you examples to show your child. Then, in the section entitled "Proofreading Student Compositions," we will repeat some of the papers that were revised in Chapter 5. This section also begins with a page entitled "Guidelines for Proofreading." Follow these guidelines as you look at these papers and help your child practice proofreading them.

Spelling

Spelling errors are probably the most common of all mistakes in the early grades. This is to be expected because children are still becoming familiar with the most basic and frequently used spelling patterns. They are also learning long or unusual words such as *congratulations* and *expedition*, and they are still figuring out when to use *there* or *their* and *accept* or *except*.

Younger children may not realize the importance of correct spelling because they know what they are writing. You can emphasize the need for correct spelling by pointing out that your child is writing for someone *else* to read.

> Nuthing iz hardr two reed then a papper weth alot of mispeled wrds.

As the preceding sentence proves, *nothing is harder to read than a paper with a lot of misspelled words*. You see how much more quickly you can read a sentence and grasp its meaning when you don't have to stumble over misspelled words and wonder what the author meant.

As you proofread, ask your child if there are any words that look wrong. Draw a circle around the word. Some sounds can be spelled in more than one way (as with the /f/ sound in *stuff, graph*, and *rough*), so look at the logical possibilities to find the right spelling. If necessary, help your child look them up in a dictionary.

If your child doesn't realize that some words in a composition are misspelled, then you might point out a few of these words and ask if they look right. Accurate spelling is learned gradually over many years of attention to spelling. Don't ask for perfection. Look for gradual improvement.

Some groups of two or three words sound exactly the same but have different spellings and meanings: *here* and *hear*; *for* and *four*; *to*, *too*, and *two*; and so on. These words (called *homophones*) need to be studied carefully so your child knows which spelling goes with which meaning.

We are waiting *for* a ride.
There are *four* wheels on the wagon.

We will *be* there in an hour.
A *bee* keeps buzzing around my head.

In other cases, children sometimes confuse two words that sound almost alike but really are different: *are* and *our* or *wear* and *where*. Careful pronunciation can emphasize the difference in these pairs of words.

PRACTICE: Correcting Spelling Errors

Start proofreading by asking your child to put a circle around anything that doesn't look right. You and your child can practice doing this in the following composition, written by a third-grader. Focus on the spelling errors, even though you may notice other mistakes as well. By working through an error-filled paper such as this, your child should come to appreciate the importance of correct spelling. After circling an error, write the correct spelling above it. Let your child do the work. You can discuss the corrections afterwards.

The Kid Who Dremed of Flying a jet

ther was a lettle boy that dremed of flying a jet. he wold darw perters of jet's and plared weth jet toys ant he buot a modle earplean. One day went he was 25 yers old he got to fly a jet.

Now your child can rewrite this composition with the correct spellings. Remember, don't insist on perfection. Let it arrive over time.

Here is a version with the correct spellings in **boldface**. Capital letters have been provided as necessary, and a missing word has been added, too.

> The Kid Who **Dreamed** of Flying a jet
>
> **There** was a **little** boy **who dreamed** of flying a **jet**. **He would draw pictures** of **jets** and [he] played **with** jet toys **and** he **bought** a **model airplane**. One day **when** he was 25 **years** old he got to fly a jet.

Sentence Structure

In the elementary grades, children tend to make the same kinds of mistakes when they write sentences. They either string several sentences together without a break, or they leave out important words that spoil the clarity of the sentence. We will talk about each of these problems in sections entitled Run-on Sentences and Sentence Fragments, but first we need to discuss sentence structure in general.

Young children tend to write as they speak. The words tumble out as fast as they can, with little regard for anything except telling about what interests them. When they write for someone else to read, however, they need to observe the conventions that make sentences clear *on paper*.

*The most important thing to remember is that each sentence has a **subject** and a **predicate**.*

- The **subject** tells who or what is doing something in the sentence. The subject is usually a **noun** or a **pronoun**.

John is my friend. **He** lives down the street.

Pronouns are unclear unless we know what they refer to. Whenever a pronoun such as *he* is used, it must be preceded by a noun. This noun is called the *antecedent*. In the example you just saw, the proper noun *John* is the antecedent, given in the first sentence. We can tell that the pronoun *he* in the second sentence clearly refers to John.

Pronouns can be particularly confusing if there is more than one antecedent. For example:

The car swerved to miss a truck. *It* scraped its fender on a wall.

In the second sentence, does the pronoun *it* refer to the car or the truck? We can't tell. In this case, we need to specify which one was involved in the scraping:

The car swerved to miss a truck. The car scraped its fender on a wall.

In the next sentence, however, the antecedent is clear:

Paul plays for our team, and *he* is a very good hitter.

❖ The **predicate** tells what the subject is doing. The most important word in the predicate is the **verb**. Many verbs express action.

The batter **hit** a home run.
My friends **play** ball with me.
We **watch** movies sometimes.

Other verbs tell what something *is*, not what it does.

My dog **is** very lazy.
I **am** in the fourth grade.
My mom **was** our softball coach.

❖ After the subject and the verb, many sentences contain some other words that tell more about what happened. These are called **sentence complements** because they complete the information we need to understand the sentence fully.

We met them *at the mall.*
John and I played ball *until it got dark.*
My sister got a new dress *for her graduation.*

The sentence complement at the end of each sentence tells where or when or why something happened. Even so, the main things to look for are the subject and verb of each sentence. When you have found these in one sentence, look for the subject of the next sentence. Make sure to use the right punctuation at the end of one sentence. Begin the next one with a capital letter.

- When sentences make a **statement**, they usually have a subject followed immediately by the verb: "We are in the right place." When sentences ask a **question**, the verb often comes first, especially if it is a "helping verb" such as *am*, *are*, *is*, or *were*. Then the subject comes next: "Are we in the right place?"

Here are some *declarative sentences* that make statements. Each one is followed by an *interrogative sentence* that asks a question. You can see how the subject and verb switch places in each pair of sentences.

He is at home. (Statement)
Is he at home? (Question)

They are out of town.
Are they out of town?

We were supposed to meet them here.
Were we supposed to meet them here?

I am the winner.
Am I the winner?

PRACTICE: Identifying Subject and Verb

Help your child identify the subject and the verb in each of the following sentences. Write the letter **S** above the subject and the letter **V** above the verb. You can get additional practice by doing the same thing with anything else your child is reading or writing.

1. The old car rattled down the street.
2. Two squirrels chased each other around the old tree.
3. Are you the person who called me?
4. My friend gave me a nice gift.
5. Our cat hid her kittens under the stairs.
6. Is he still out of town?

In the statements, the subject and verb are: (1) car rattled; (2) squirrels chased; (4) friend gave; and (5) cat hid. In the questions, the verb and subject are: (3) Are you; and (6) Is he.

For more information on writing clear sentences and for practice activities for your children, turn to the grammar books available from the Family Learning Association, 1-800-925-7853, or visit the website **www.kidscanlearn.com**.

Run-on Sentences

In most of the papers we have looked at, children have used many "run-on sentences."

> Run-on sentences consist of several individual sentences strung together without any breaks there aren't any capital letters at the beginning of sentences there aren't any punctuation marks at the end you don't know where one sentence starts and the other stops it's hard to read.

You have just read a run-on sentence. When we use capital letters and end punctuation to write separate sentences, the meaning of these sentences becomes clear.

> Run-on sentences consist of several individual sentences strung together without any breaks. There aren't any capital letters at the beginning of sentences. There aren't any punctuation marks at the end. You don't know where one sentence starts and the other stops. It's hard to read.

As with spelling errors, younger children may not realize that run-on sentences cause problems for the reader. Children know what they want to say and they believe that the words alone are sufficient. You can emphasize the importance of clear sentence structure by showing your child this example:

> I am going to write about my trip to the zoo it was fun and we saw lots of animals there was an elephant and they had a giraffe we saw birds and fish too I can't wait to go back

This is written the same way children talk. They are excited about what they have seen and the words just tumble out. After your child has looked at the run-on version, see if the following isn't easier to understand.

I am going to write about my trip to the zoo. It was fun and we saw lots of animals. There was an elephant and they had a giraffe. We saw birds and fish, too. I can't wait to go back.

In order to make sentence structure clear to the reader, your child has to remember to use the special marks that let us know when a sentence begins and ends. This topic is discussed in the section entitled *Punctuation Marks* below.

PRACTICE: Correcting Run-on Sentences

Have your child work on the following example by a fourth-grader. Put a circle around each spot at which one sentence should end and the next one begin. Spelling errors have already been corrected, so you can focus on clarifying sentences. After marking each spot, rewrite the example correctly. In this example, only the period is needed as the end punctuation.

A Good Friend

There once was a kid that just moved in where my old friend used to live now I am his friend and every day after school we go to the park sometimes we go to the ice cream store on weekends we go to the mall we get 15 dollars for allowance each week I did not get my allowance last week and I got mad at my mom she told me to go to my room.

Your corrected version:

Here is one way to clear up the run-on sentences. Your version may differ slightly.

A Good Friend

There once was a kid [who] just moved in where my old friend used to live. **Now** I am his friend and every day after school we go to the park. **Sometimes** we go to the ice cream store. **On** weekends we go to the mall. **We** get 15 dollars for allowance each week. **I** did not get my allowance last week and I got mad at my mom. **She** told me to go to my room.

Sentence Fragments

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the *sentence fragment*: a sentence that lacks an important element, usually the subject or the verb. Here is an example:

> I like to go swimming. is a lot of fun. My friends go swimming with me. We always a good time.

In the second sentence, the subject is left out: "**It** is a lot of fun." In the last sentence, the verb is left out: "We always **have** a good time."

In many cases, children write sentence fragments simply because they are in a hurry, trying to get ideas down as fast as possible. When you see fragments, help your child look back to determine what is missing. Just ask these questions:

1. "Does this sentence tell *who* is doing something?" (Does it have a subject?)

2. "Does this sentence tell *what* someone is doing?" (Does it have a verb in the predicate?)

PRACTICE: Correcting Sentence Fragments

With your child, look at each of the following sentences and find out what is missing. If the Subject has been omitted, write an S at the correct spot. If the Verb is missing, write a V at the correct spot. Then rewrite each sentence, supplying your own subject or verb.

1. My friends to play ball.

2. Bill and went to see a movie.

3. The pitcher a perfect baseball game.

4. We at the funny story in the magazine.

5. looked all over for the missing gloves.

In sentence (1), a verb such as *like* or *want* needs to be added. In sentence (2), part of the subject is missing: "Bill and **I**" or "Bill and **Jeff**" or some other name needs to be added. In sentence (3), the verb is missing: a word such as *threw* or *pitched* would work. In sentence (4), a verb such as *laughed* is needed. In sentence (5), a subject such as *we* or *they* or *she* should be added.

Punctuation Marks

One other important factor has to be considered when we talk about writing clear sentences—using the right **punctuation marks**. Stress the importance of following the punctuation guidelines given here.

Beginning Punctuation

- Begin *every* sentence with a **capital letter**.

End Punctuation

The punctuation at the end of the sentence is determined by the type of sentence.

- End each *statement* with a **period (.)**.

Somebody said there were some donuts around here.

- End each *question* with a **question mark (?)**.

Where are all the donuts?

- End each expression of *surprise* with an **exclamation mark (!)**.

I can't believe they're all gone!

Younger children must take care to notice where one sentence ends and the next begins. Of course, this means that they must know how sentences are constructed. Review the material in the section on *Sentence Structure* if your child isn't sure of this.

Commas

A most important punctuation mark is the **comma**. Commas can help make sentences clear to the reader.

- ❖ Commas should be used when three or more related items are grouped in the same sentence. These may occur in the subject part of the sentence or at the end (after the verb).

Mary, Ellen, and I are in the same class.
At the zoo we saw lions, tigers, elephants, and zebras.

If no commas are used in the first sentence, you can see the problem that results:

Mary Ellen and I are in the same class.

This looks like we are talking about one girl named Mary Ellen instead of two girls named Mary and Ellen.

Commas also help to clarify sentences that have more than two verbs.

We like to *play* baseball, *go* swimming, and *eat* hot dogs.

- ❖ Commas should also be used when there is a long introductory section before the main part of the sentence.

When the rain started to pour, we ran back to the car.

For more information on the use of commas, see the grammar books offered by the Family Learning Association. Call 1-800-925-7853 for a catalog or information.

PRACTICE: Using Punctuation Marks Correctly

Make sure each sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with the correct mark. Also use commas where they are needed. After you circle the errors in each sentence, write the correct version.

1. we waited an hour for them to arrive

2. will you please answer the phone

3. i couldn't believe he scored three touchdowns

4. allan lewis and i play three of the most important positions

5. before you start to eat be sure to wash your hands

6. they had apples pears grapes and oranges at the market

7. when is the game supposed to start

✔ ***Check your work***

Here are the corrected sentences.

1. We waited an hour for them to arrive.
2. Will you please answer the phone?
3. I couldn't believe he scored three touchdowns!
4. Allan, Lewis, and I play three of the most important positions.
5. Before you start to eat, be sure to wash your hands.
6. They had apples, pears, grapes, and oranges at the market.
7. When is the game supposed to start?

Grammar

Even if sentences begin with capital letters and end with the right punctuation marks, they must also be constructed clearly and correctly. This is where *grammar* comes in. The word grammar simply refers to the relationships among words in the sentence.

Obviously we can tell that this sentence is wrong:

We a game television on watched.

The problem here is word order. The words are all mixed up. They should read like this in order to make a clear sentence:

We watched a game on television.

Most children grasp this very quickly, but there are other grammar errors that are more difficult to spot.

- The subject and verb must agree in number. That is, a *singular* noun or pronoun in the subject must be followed by a *singular* verb. That's the reason it is incorrect to say, "A car are stuck in the mud."

One **car is** stuck in the mud.
This **book was** very interesting.
He plays football on my team.

A *plural* noun or pronoun in the subject must be followed by a *plural* verb:

Two **cars are** stuck in the mud.
Both **books were** very interesting.
They play football on my team.

❖ Pronouns can be used as subjects or objects in sentences. Here are the two categories of *personal pronouns* that are used most often.

Subject Pronouns

Singular	Plural
I	we
you	you
he, she, it	they

Object Pronouns

Singular	Plural
me	us
you	you
him, her, it	them

Object pronouns are often used right after the verb:

They told **me** a secret.
I saw **him** at the game.

Object pronouns are also required after prepositions such as *to*, *for*, and *with*.

This book belongs **to her**.
It is time **for us** to leave.
I went to the game **with them**.

Children (and others) sometimes use object pronouns as subjects, especially when the pronoun is joined with another name.

Tom and **me** play on the same team.
Sally and **her** pushed me in the mud!

In these sentences, the subjects should be "Tom and I" and "Sally and she."

In a more frequent mistake, subject pronouns are used as objects. Here are some typical examples:

Our friends gave Ed and **I** a present.
They gave a party for Ellen and **I**.

Give the message to **she** and Marie.
I went to the movie with **he** and Bill.

These problems usually occur when the pronoun is used along with someone's name. Just remember how you would use pronouns by themselves; then follow the same rule when there are other words in the subject or object.

Tom plays on my team.
I play on Tom's team.
Tom and I play on the same team.

They gave a party for **Ellen**.
They gave a party for **me**.
They gave a party for **Ellen** and **me**.

- Children sometimes write several sentences that are joined by the word *and*. This is not necessarily incorrect, but it can become confusing when it's overdone.

One day a dog was walking along and a big storm came along and the dog got so scared he ran away to Florida and he bought a big house by a beach and he had a big boat and a fancy car and his partner was a cat and they were friends and they had fun.

Ask your child to circle places he would change to clarify this passage.

These aren't quite the same as run-on sentences, but the effect is similar because there are no breaks between ideas—just endless *ands*. This would be much clearer if the reader could see individual sentences.

One day a dog was walking along **when** a big storm came along. **The** dog got so scared that he ran away to Florida. **He** bought a big house by a beach and he had a big boat and a fancy car. **His** partner was a cat and they were friends and they had fun.

PRACTICE: Correcting Grammar Errors

Here is a paragraph that contains the kinds of errors just discussed. Circle each mistake; then write your corrected version on your own paper.

My brother Bob and me went for a hike in the woods. We saw lots of animals and birds. Two squirrels was chasing each other around a tree. Some of the trees was so big that we couldn't get our arms around them.

One time we got separated and I thought we were lost and I didn't think we would ever find each other when we didn't come back our parents started to look for us. They finally found my brother and I just before it got dark. Bob and me certainly won't do that again!

✔ *Check your version.*

Here is a corrected version of the preceding example.

My brother Bob and **I** went for a hike in the woods. We saw lots of animals and birds. Two squirrels **were** chasing each other around a tree. Some of the trees **were** so big that we couldn't get our arms around them.

One time we got separated and I thought we were lost. I didn't think we would ever find each other**! When** we didn't come back**,** our parents started to look for us. They finally found my brother and **me** just before it got dark. I don't think Bob and **I** will do that again!

Apostrophes

In the elementary grades, children are not always sure when to use the apostrophe (’). Here are the most common situations:

Possessives

- Apostrophes are used to form *possessive nouns* which show that something belongs to someone. With singular nouns, we show possession by adding an apostrophe and the letter **s** (**’s**) at the end of the noun:

That is my friend**’s** bike.
I lost my brother**’s** book.

When children use possessive nouns, they often forget the apostrophe (and sometimes the letter **s** as well).

My dogs collar got lost.
My dog**’s** collar got lost.

I went to a game at my brother school.
I went to a game at my brother**’s** school.

When your child uses singular possessive nouns, make sure the ‘**s** is added to show ownership.

Plural possessive nouns aren’t used as often, but they usually follow a consistent pattern, too. When the plural noun ends in **s**, just add an apostrophe to show ownership.

All the boys coats are in the closet.
All the boys’ coats are in the closet.

Three of the cars horns didn’t work.
Three of the cars’ horns didn’t work.

Contractions

> ❖ The apostrophe is also used in *contractions*. These are formed by joining two words and omitting one or more letters in the second word. The apostrophe takes the place of the omitted letter.

Contractions are often formed by joining the word *not* to a verb.

I do not know the answer.
I **don't** know the answer.

He is not in my class.
He **isn't** in my class.

Other contractions are formed by joining a pronoun with a form of the verb *to be*.

I am in the fifth grade.
I'm in the fifth grade.

You are my best friend.
You're my best friend.

She is a good basketball player.
She's a good basketball player.

We are going on vacation next month.
We're going on vacation next month.

As with possessive nouns, make sure your child uses the apostrophe in the right place.

The word *it* causes particular problems because it can be used to show possession or in a contraction with *is*. To show possession, the word is spelled *its*.

The wagon lost *its* wheel.
The whole school was proud of *its* team.

When the word is used in a contraction, it is spelled *it's*.

It's very cold today.
(*It is* very cold today.)

I don't think *it's* ever going to warm up.
(I don't think *it is* ever going to warm up.)

To make sure you are using the right form, just ask yourself if you are saying *it is*. If you are, then use the spelling *it's*. If you are using the word to show that something belongs to another thing, use the spelling *its*.

❖ One other word should be said about apostrophes. Children sometimes think they should use **'s** to form the plural of nouns. This is never the case. Most nouns simply add the letter **s** without an apostrophe to form the plural.

There are two book's on the shelf. (wrong)
There are two books on the shelf.

PRACTICE: Using Apostrophes

The following sentences lack necessary apostrophes or they use apostrophes incorrectly. Circle each error and write the correct version on the line after each sentence. Also tell whether the apostrophe is used to show *possession* or is used in a *contraction.*

1. Its going to rain.

_____

How used? _____

2. Were going to be late.

_____

How used? _____

3. My dogs collar is missing.

_____

How used? _____

4. I dont have any more paper.

_____

How used? _____

5. My friends cat got caught in a tree.

_____

How used? _____

Proofreading Student Compositions

Here are some guidelines to follow as you help your child proofread compositions. The items listed below follow the order of material given on the preceding pages, so you can look back for help if necessary. These guidelines can be used to correct the compositions given on the following pages, and they can also be used as your child proofreads original work.

Guidelines for Proofreading

A. Spelling

- Are all words spelled correctly?

B. Sentence Structure

- Does each sentence have a clear subject and predicate?
- Are pronouns used correctly? Make sure the reader can tell who or what each pronoun refers to.

C. Run-on Sentences

- Are several sentences strung together without breaks?
- Does each sentence begin with a capital letter and end with the right punctuation mark?

D. Sentence Fragments

- Do any sentences lack any important words? Make sure there is a subject and verb in each sentence.

E. Punctuation Marks

- Does each sentence begin with a capital letter?
- Is the right punctuation mark used at the end of each sentence?
- Are commas used to separate several items in a row?

F. Grammar

- Do the subject and verb agree in number? A singular subject requires a singular verb: "He *plays* on my team." A plural subject requires a plural verb: "They *play* on my team."
- Are pronouns used correctly? The subject pronouns are *I, you, he, she, it, we,* and *they.* The object pronouns are *me, you, him, her, it, us,* and *them.*
- Are several sentences joined by the word *and*? Don't use *and* to connect a number of sentences that should be separated.

G. Apostrophes

- Is the apostrophe used correctly to show possession?

  The *boy's* book is on the table.

  Two *girls'* coats are in the closet.
- Is the apostrophe used correctly in contractions?

  I'm going to see a movie.

  We're late already.

  I *don't* know the answer.

  It *isn't* very warm in here.

Practice Proofreading

On the following pages we will repeat the compositions that were revised earlier. First we will give the version with all the spelling and grammar errors left intact. Then we will proofread and make the necessary corrections (given in **boldface**).

You can use the "Guidelines for Proofreading" to remind your child of the work previously covered. As you read through each composition, ask your child to put a circle around each misspelled word or other error that needs to be corrected and to write the correction.

Grade Three

Here is a paper that has been organized into paragraphs, but there are still many spelling errors and other mistakes. Circle and correct all the errors you find. Then check your work against the proofread version on the next page.

My Pets

I have two pets there names are Hiedy and Oreo. They bouth love me.

This is how my family got Hiedy. We were at the Human sasiety and wanted a pet. We looked for hours and hours and then we fond our dog. We took her to our house.

She was in our new house in the garaj. She was a little puppy you could hold. She was so skiny you could see her bouns. I cared for her and she stayed.

She is a good dog we looked up a name and we fond one. She likes it with us. I love bouth of them thay are so cute.

✔ *Check your work*

Here is the same composition with all errors corrected. The changes are given in **boldface**. Did you notice all these mistakes?

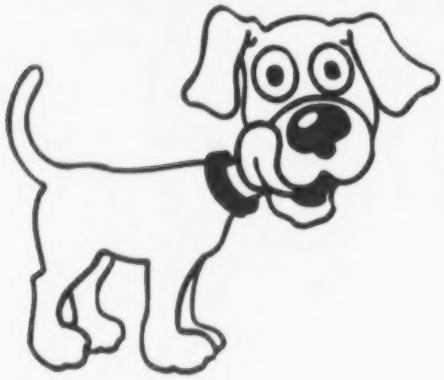
My Pets

I have two pets**.** **Their** names are Hiedy and Oreo. They **both** love me.

This is how my family got Hiedy. We were at the **Humane Society** and wanted a pet. We looked for hours and hours and then we **found** our dog. We took her to our house.

She was in our new house in the **garage**. She was a little puppy you could hold. She was so **skinny** you could see her **bones**. I cared for her and she stayed.

She is a good dog**.** **We** looked up a name and we **found** one. She likes it with us. I love **both** of them**.** **They** are so cute.



As you see, after we organized this paper into paragraphs, the only thing it needed was correction of the spelling errors.

Grade Four

Here is the composition about endangered animals, with spelling and grammar errors unchanged. Ask your child to proofread it and to circle all the errors.

Indangered Animals in America

[Many animal species disappear because they are all killed or their living space is destroyed.] Indangered animals must be helped from becoming extinct, [and there are many things we all can do].

[In America, some of] the animals I've heard of just about becoming extinct are Florida flamingo [and] brown bear (in most states). Those are just a very few of the animals.

I am proud to see that America is doing something by breeding these animals, protecting eggs and the young, finding if the animals go to the same place during mating season, finding food for these animals, and finding out who their enimies are.

I've been trying to help these animals by donating money. It makes me sad to think of animals in other contries that are not being helped. I am content to be in a contry that does. It makes me realy happy to know America realy cares enough to help these animals.

Here is the corrected version after proofreading.

Endangered Animals in America

[Many animal species disappear because they are all killed or their living space is destroyed.] **Endangered** animals must be helped **so that they don't become** extinct, [and there are many things we all can do].

[In America, some of] the animals **that are** just about becoming extinct are **the** Florida flamingo **and the** brown bear (in most states). Those are just a very few of the animals.

I am proud to see that America is doing something by breeding these animals, protecting eggs and the young, finding if the animals go to the same place during mating season, finding food for these animals, and finding out who their **enemies** are.

I've been trying to help these animals by donating money. It makes me sad to think of animals in other **countries** that are not being helped. I am content to be in a **country** that does. It makes me **really** happy to know America **really** cares enough to help these animals.

In addition to correcting misspelled words, we have also improved the wording in a couple of spots. Instead of saying "Endangered animals must be *helped from* becoming extinct," it is clearer to say that "Endangered animals must be *helped so that they don't become extinct.*" You might also say, "We must *make sure that endangered animals don't become extinct.*"

In the second paragraph it is awkward to say "the animals I've heard of just about becoming extinct." We changed it to read "the animals that are just about becoming extinct."

All the other mistakes involve spelling errors. If you look back at the original paper in Chapter 4, you can see how much clearer this composition is now that we have organized it into paragraphs and corrected other mistakes.

Grade Five

The fifth-grade student who wrote about things to do is also fond of run-on sentences. If your child is able to handle material at this level, help him or her circle the errors in this version and write the corrections.

Fun Things

One of my goels in life is to be a writer my mother says I have a good emaganation.

Most of my books I write are about how I feel and what I like to do in fact I just wrote one recently it's called "The Dream Date" it's a really fun book well at least my mother likes it.

most of my stories people die in I don't know why its probluly becase if thay stay alive the storie gets boring otherwise. I only like to write short stories because there more creative and you can do enything you whant. It's like your in controlle and you have to decide what happens next.

I really injoy writing but sometimes you get so involved with the sitchuashation you just keep on writting and can't stop becase you whant to know what happens next.

I also like to ride my biike that I got for Christmas its big very big its a ten speed. My mothers always saying act your age not you shoe size but I can't becase I take size ten and I'm ten years old so thats fun!

Now notice how many changes were made when we proofread this paper.

Now notice how many changes were made when we proofread this paper.

Fun Things

One of my **goals** in life is to be a writer. **My** mother says I have a good **imagination**.

Most of my books are about how I feel and what I like to do. **In** fact I just wrote one recently called "The Dream Date." **It's** a really fun book. **Well,** at least my mother likes it.

In most of my stories, people die. I don't know why. **It's probably because** if **they** stay alive the **story** gets boring. I only like to write short stories because **they're** more creative and you can do **anything** you **want**. It's like **you're** in **control** and you have to decide what happens next.

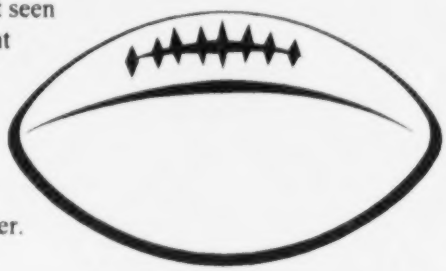
I really **enjoy** writing but sometimes you get so involved with the **situation** you just keep on **writing** and can't stop **because** you **want** to know what happens next.

I also like to ride my **bike** that I got for Christmas. **It's** big—very big. **It's** a ten speed. My **mother's** always saying, **"Act** your age, not **your** shoe size." **But** I can't **because** I take size ten and I'm ten years old, so **that's** fun!

In addition to the misspelled words and run-on sentences, there are a few other changes we made to improve this paper. In the second paragraph, it is redundant to say "Most of my books I write." It is enough just to say, "Most of my books." The third paragraph also began with an awkward sentence: "most of my storys people die in." It is better to begin by saying, "In most of my stories, people die."

Additional Practice in Proofreading

Here is a paper we haven't seen before. It is by a third-grade student who likes football. It is difficult to read, primarily because of the many misspelled words. Go through this with your child and mark all the errors. Then write a corrected version on your own paper.



Football

My favorit sport is footbal. and my favorit team is the Satil Sehaks. They have wone most of thir games but they hav never ben to the Superbowl but I bet this yer they whoud do beter. I gust hop they go to the Superbowl next year. seatil virs The bares and if They do I'm voting about Seatil Seckas and if they win it whodl be a merikal becous They never won the Superbowl befor in their life

✔ ***Check your work***

Football

My **favorite** sport is football, and my favorite **team** is the **Seattle Seahawks**. They have **won** most of **their** games but they **have** never **been** to the Superbowl. **I** bet this **year** they **will** do **better**. I **just hope** they go to the Superbowl next year. **Seattle versus** the **Bears. If** they do **go to the Superbowl** I'm voting **on the** Seattle Seahawks. **And** if they win it **will** be a **miracle because** they never won the Superbowl **before** in their life.

Notice how much more quickly you can read and understand this composition when you don't have to puzzle over misspelled words and run-on sentences.

Also notice that a few other corrections have been made in addition to misspellings and run-on sentences. It is better to say **will** instead of **would** (misspelled *whoud* and *whodl*) because we are talking about something that may happen in the future. We added a few words to make things clearer (as in the sentence, "If they do *go to the Superbowl*"). Also, we changed words in spots such as, "I'm voting *on* the Seattle Seahawks" (instead of "I'm voting *about*").

Proofreading Your Child's Compositions

Use the guidelines and examples in this chapter to help your child proofread each composition after it has been revised. As we said earlier, don't be overly concerned if your child doesn't find every mistake. Just guide her in the direction of carefully reading for errors and fixing those that are found. Work for improvement, not perfection.

On the next page you will find another copy of the guidelines that were given earlier in this chapter. Make photocopies if you like so that your child can have these suggestions handy while proofreading each paper.

Guidelines for Proofreading

A. Spelling

- Are all words spelled correctly?

B. Sentence Structure

- Does each sentence have a clear subject and predicate?
- Are pronouns used correctly? Make sure the reader can tell who or what each pronoun refers to.

C. Run-on Sentences

- Are several sentences strung together without breaks?
- Does each sentence begin with a capital letter and end with the right punctuation mark?

D. Sentence Fragments

- Do any sentences lack any important words? Make sure there is a subject and verb in each sentence.

E. Punctuation Marks

- Does each sentence begin with a capital letter?
- Is the right punctuation mark used at the end of each sentence?
- Are commas used to separate several items in a row?

F. Grammar

- Do the subject and verb agree in number? A singular subject requires a singular verb: "He *plays* on my team." A plural subject requires a plural verb: "They *play* on my team."
- Are pronouns used correctly? The subject pronouns are *I, you, he, she, it, we,* and *they.* The object pronouns are *me, you, him, her, it, us,* and *them.*
- Are several sentences joined by the word *and*? Don't use *and* to connect a number of sentences that should be separated.

G. Apostrophes

- Is the apostrophe used correctly to show possession?

  One *boy's* book is on the table.

  Two *girls'* books are on the shelves
- Is the apostrophe used correctly in contractions?

  I'm going to see a movie.

  We're late already.

  I *don't* know the answer.

  It *isn't* very warm in here.

7

Writing Descriptions

If you're looking for topics to write about, why not describe things you see in everyday life? This appeals to your child's imagination and also encourages the use of a large vocabulary that helps the reader "see" what is being described.

Descriptions can be even more interesting after a new experience, for example: a visit to the zoo, a plane trip, an excursion to a new city. Here your child can search for the most colorful words to tell all about the fascinating new sights and sounds that he encountered.

Search for Descriptive Words

One good way to get started is to write down any descriptive words or phrases that apply to the personal experience. For example, if your child is going to write about a trip to the beach, then these phrases might come to mind:

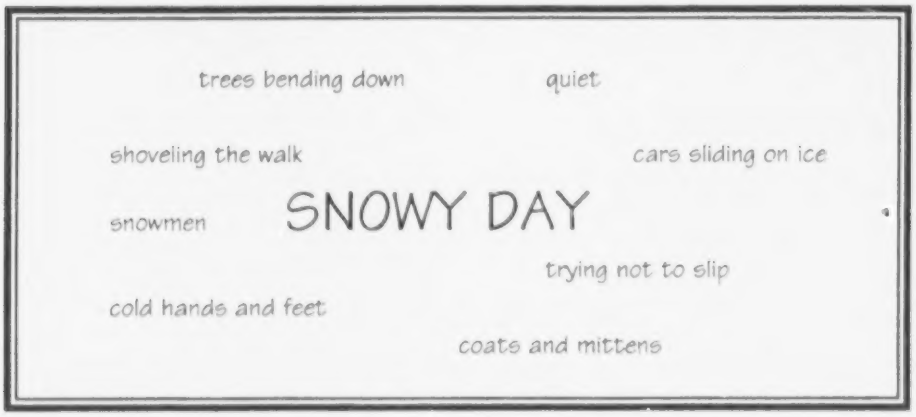
hot sand
footprints in the sand
waves splashing on shore
wind blowing
seaweed and driftwood

Use these descriptive phrases to challenge your child's imagination. Develop sentences that help the reader see what you are describing.

> When we got to the beach, the hot sand burned our feet. We ran quickly to get to the water. We could see lots of footprints in the sand. Other people had done the same thing we had. . . .

Another way to approach this is to use *word clusters*. These are made up of terms that help to describe the topic you are planning to write about. Just write the main idea or topic in the center of the page and then add individual bits of

description that fit that topic. Here are some descriptions that come to mind when you write about a snowy day:



Use Precise Words

Remind your child of the types of words that lend color and precision to descriptions. By using words more exactly, we enable the reader to see the word picture we are painting.

First of all, keep in mind the importance of **nouns**. If you describe a walk through a forest, you see *trees, leaves, branches, bushes, squirrels,* and other animals. If you go to the zoo, you probably see *monkeys, zebras, lions, elephants,* and *giraffes*. The more accurately you name things that relate to the subject you are describing, the clearer the picture will be.

Obviously **adjectives** can be most helpful. These are words whose main function is to describe nouns—to tell more about them by lending specific characteristics: a *big* tree; a *hot* day; a *slow* game; a *smooth* rock; and so on.

Verbs are also valuable because they tell how people or animals or other creatures behave. Monkeys may *swing* from branch to branch, *hop* across the ground, *chase* each other, and *squawk* or *chatter* loudly. Other animals behave in ways that are unique to them. In a storm, trees *sway* in the wind and leaves *swirl* across the lawn. Use the verbs that describe how each animal or person moves and behaves.

Look at the words listed below. In the first column you see some verbs and adjectives that are used every day. They are so general and familiar that they don't help to give clear descriptions. In the second column you see specific, colorful words that make your writing more precise. Use the word that fits each situation exactly.

Everyday words	Precise words
walk	stroll, saunter, amble
run	scamper, skitter, gallop
fly	soar, glide, swoop
laugh	giggle, chuckle, snicker
big	huge, enormous, gigantic
fast	swift, speedy, rapid
rough	rugged, uneven, jagged
bad	rotten, crummy, inferior

You and your child will enjoy thinking of more everyday words that can be replaced by more precise, colorful ones. This is a good time to look at a thesaurus designed for the elementary grades. There you will find a wealth of synonyms that express similar meanings with differing degrees of precision.

At the end of this chapter you will find a worksheet that will help your child write descriptions by thinking of particular words and phrases that fit a certain subject.

Grade Three

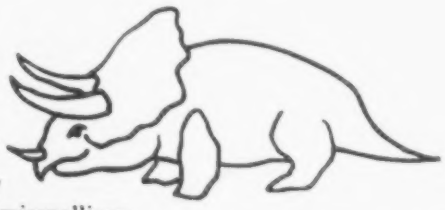
Here is a third-grade paper that tells about dinosaurs. The writer is obviously interested in the subject and knows a lot about dinosaurs. This paper also has an effective beginning that asks the reader a question in the very first sentence (although the question mark needs to be added).

Dinosaurs

Have you seen the dinosaur bones in the museum there are all kinds of dinosaurs there was the most meanest one called the Iryanasaurus Rex he was a meat eater he was also fast he could eat any of the other dinosaurs but not the largest dinosaur that was the Brontosaurus he was a plant eater he could go in the water so no other animal could get him There was the stetgosaurus he was a plant eater to but he could not go in the water he had spikes on his tale to protect himself. The Iryceritops has two horns on his head he is a plant eater too his horns protect him. There was a dinosaur with a duckbill that could go in water he was a plant eater. There was a dinosaur that was shaped like a brontosaurus but had flippers he was a meat eater and there was one like a turtle and it was a plant eater. There was one like a shark that was a plant eater.

Now look back through this paper to see if there are any improvements you might make. The first thing you notice is that the writer has strung many run-on sentences together without using periods and capital letters. Put a circle around each spot that needs to be corrected. Then write your revised version on your own paper.

✔ *Check your work*



Here is one possible revision of this paper about dinosaurs. Of course, yours may vary in some details. The only significant misspellings involve the names of dinosaurs themselves. The order of sentences is not bad; they just need to be grouped into paragraphs. Most of all, the run-on sentences need to be separated with the correct punctuation.

Dinosaurs

Have you seen the dinosaur bones in the museum? **T**here are all kinds of dinosaurs.

There was the most meanest one called the **Tyrannosaurus Rex. H**e was a meat eater **and** he was also fast. **H**e could eat any of the other dinosaurs but not the largest dinosaur. **T**hat was the Brontosaurus. **H**e was a plant eater. **H**e could go in the water so no other animal could get him.

There was the **Stegosaurus. H**e was a plant eater, **too,** but he could not go in the water. **H**e had spikes on his **tail** to protect himself. The **Triceratops** has two horns on his head. **H**e is a plant eater, too. **H**is horns protect him.

There was a dinosaur with a duckbill that could go in water. **H**e was a plant eater. There was a dinosaur that was shaped like a brontosaurus but had flippers. **H**e was a meat eater. **A**nd there was one like a turtle and it was a plant eater. There was one like a shark that was a plant eater.

Here is another third-grade paper that gives a good description of dogs. After you read it, you may want to make a few improvements. In particular, this paper would be better if it were organized into several paragraphs. Put a circle around each spot that needs to be improved. Then write your improvements on your own paper.

Dogs

Dogs are four-legged animals. You can use dogs to hunt and to guard and other things. Like a pet. I have a pet dog that is wild. He is a solid black dog with a white spot on his paw. A dog has a great sence of smell. If you got lost your dog could get you home. If your dog got sick and you are to bring it to the vet. The vet is a place where a man or woman gives a shot or medicine or a liquid. A vet has a special tallent. He is also lilke a doctor but a doctor takes care of people not animals. The way you keep your dog feeling good is to feed it at night and in the morning. Walk your dog around for exercise. Sometimes play with your dog for 10 to 20 minutes. Then your dog will be in shape.

Grade Four

This paper by a fourth-grade student tells a lot about snakes. After you read it, go back and mark the spots that you want to change. Then write your version on your own paper.

Snakes

I like snakes because they are neat and there fears they don't fear anything there strong and if you like them so much that you want one as a pet and the best kind you can get is the ball python because it seems to not bite and kills its prey by squeezing related to the several large snakes reach a lenth of five feet and feeds on rats mice baby chicks rabbits and other small mammals and lives tropical climets and Lives in Asia Africa and Australia

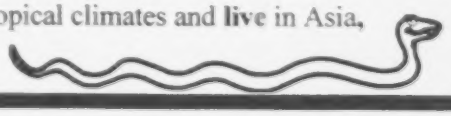
✔ ***Check your work***

Here is a possible revision of the paper about snakes. We have added a few words in some places and deleted some in other places to make things clearer. Notice the importance of commas in separating lists of items in the second paragraph. Compare this with the original to see what changes have been made.

Snakes

I like snakes because they are neat. They don't fear anything **and they're** strong. If you like them so much that you want one as a pet, the best kind you can get is the ball python because it **does** not bite and kills its prey by squeezing.

Several large snakes reach a **length** of five feet and feed on rats, mice, baby chicks, rabbits, and other small mammals. **They live in** tropical climates and **live** in Asia, Africa, and Australia.



Grade Five

Here are two fifth-grade papers describing what it's like to experience the arrival of spring in the northwest. They are both very well written, with only a few small mistakes. They also show how effective descriptions can be when they use a wide, colorful vocabulary. This is what some students can do by the time they reach the fifth grade; just read these papers and enjoy them. You may want to use them as examples of good composition and discuss your reasons.

Spring in the Northwest

Flowers in the Northwest are very pretty. You should come see them sometime. When the flowers start to bloom, they make the city look pretty. When you go walking around the city, you can see all the pretty flowers in everybody's yard. Right now the ones that are blooming are daffodils and tulups [tulips]. Those are not the only ones we have.

In the Northwest we have losts [lots] of rain. Probably more than you have ever had. When the rain is ready to blow, the sky gets dark. Sometimes when the rain hits, it can hit very hard. When the rain gets over blowing it steam you might be able to see a rainbow. After it rains and you go outside, you can smell the flowers and the fresh air.

In Oregon, we have lots of trees. Most of our trees grow in yards and out in the country and the forest. Here are some of the names of our trees. We have apple, plum, cherry, and pine trees. When you eat our fruit it tastes very good and sweet. If you have fruit trees in your back, you can eat them anytime.

It's almost always raining in the Northwest. On the freezing days, the rain is almost hail turning into sleet. On the hot days, the warm rain goes off and on like a dripping faucet. The normal days, it seems like the cold rain will never stop, but it always does. Soft rain is uasually [usually] warm and it just trickles a bit. Oregon would never be without our beautiful rain.

Lovely flowers line the roads with dazzling colors. Lavender and deep, dark purple irises lightly sway in the soft breeze of Spring. Bright yellow daffodils grow quickly with the rain. Red, yellow, and orange tulips blossom into brilliant colors and remind me of a bright red teacup at the fair.

New animals come into our world in the Springtime. Cute puppies just begin to see their new home when their eyes open. Soft bunnies curl up to their mother's warm fur. Little lambs learn to run, but they only seem to fall. Calves get lost in the crowd and soon find their proud mother grazing in the grass.

Worksheet: Writing Descriptions

Pick a topic. Write some words and phrases that describe it. You may want to write about an animal or something else that moves, or you may describe a tree or house or something that does not move. Choose the words that best fit your topic.

TOPIC _____

Adjectives Nouns Verbs

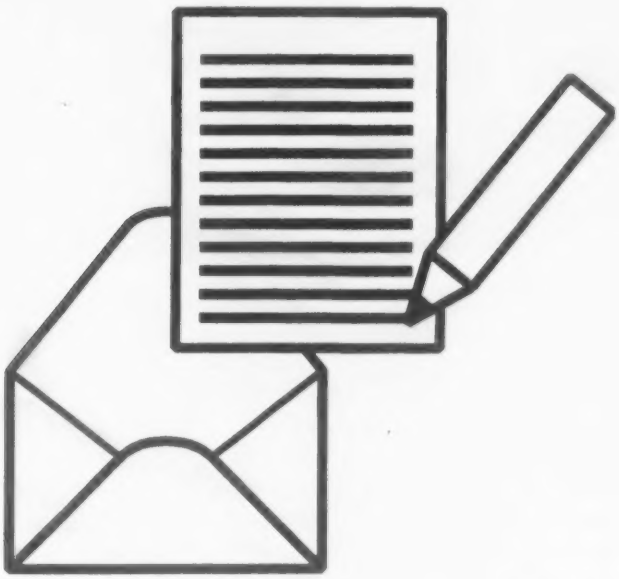
Decide on a particular point of view and describe something. For example, if you are a small animal on the ground, tell how trees and people and other things look. If you are a bird flying overhead, describe things from that viewpoint. Write something that shows your point of view.

Now use the words and ideas you have listed and write the first draft of a composition that you have been thinking about.

8

Writing Letters

Letter writing provides a great opportunity for your child to develop writing skills. It also gives a reason for writing with a clear purpose: to communicate with someone else who (we hope) will write back.



Your child probably has many opportunities to write letters to relatives and friends: thank-you notes for gifts, invitations to parties, letters telling about vacations and other things. For most of these, the format for the *friendly letter* will work very well. In other cases, your child may want to get information or send a fan letter to a favorite sports star. When writing to a company or to someone you don't know, a slightly more formal *business letter* can be used. Both of these will be discussed on the following pages.

Friendly Letters

A friendly letter begins with a **heading** in the upper right corner. This is where you give your address and the date. Then the **greeting** says "hello" to the person you are writing to: "Dear Sally" or "Dear Uncle Waldo." The **body** of the letter says what you want to say. If it is a very long letter or contains more than one topic, then use several paragraphs. When the letter is finished, the **closing** says goodbye: usually "Love" or "Your friend" or "Sincerely." Then your **signature** goes at the very end.

Heading	34 Second St. Omaha, NE 12345 June 3, 1997
Greeting	Dear Jim,
Body	I hope you had a good time on your vacation. It must have been fun to see the ocean and to go sailing. I want to see the pictures you took. We are going to the mountains next month. I've never been before, so I don't know what to expect. I hope we don't get eaten up by bears!
Closing	Your friend,
Signature	*Evan*

Format for Friendly Letters

Here is an outline you can use to practice writing friendly letters. Make more photocopies of this page if you like.

Heading

Greeting

Body

Closing

Signature

A Student's Friendly Letter

Here is a friendly letter written by a fifth-grade student. The organization of the letter itself is OK, but there are a few mistakes that need to be corrected. Circle and correct the errors; then rewrite the letter on your own paper.

123 First Street
Dallas, TX 54321

April 14, 1998

Dear Mr. Smith,

My name is Lauren. I'm eleven years old and I'm an A & B student.

What we learn in school. First we go to music or art in music we play the recorders, we sing songs, and we lern to play different instruments. In art we make things like papier-maché eggs. I like music alot better because the teacher is alot nicer. I would enjoy art if the teacher was alot nicer, but sometimes I do feel sorry for her because she doesn't have much of a family.

In reading Mrs. Short our homeroom teacher she is really nice but sometimes she losses her temper for the first fifteen minutes she reads a book to us it's called *The Secret Garden* it's really mysterious.

In science it's pretty fun this week we're planning on doing a video on littering in Texas the boys were thinking of doing a rap. It's gonna be fun! Our teacher is coach Manny we call him coach because he's our PE coach.

I'm a very good student in September we took a test at the university because our teacher recomended my friend and I. We both passed my friend was able to take french lesson there but I couldn't because my mother couldn't afford it.

When I grow up I want to be a fashion cordinator I want to be able to take mother place she couldn't afford.

Your friend,

Lauren

✔ *Check your work*

See how your corrected version compares with this one. Changes are marked in **boldface**.

123 First Street
Dallas, TX 54321
April 14, 1998

Dear Mr. Smith,

My name is Lauren. I'm eleven years old and I'm an A **and** B student.

Here is what we learn in school. First we go to music or art. **In** music we play the recorders, we sing songs, and we **learn** to play different instruments. In art we make things like papier-maché eggs. I like music **a lot** better because the teacher is **a lot** nicer. I would enjoy art if the teacher was **a lot** nicer, but sometimes I do feel sorry for her because she doesn't have much of a family.

In reading Mrs. Short, our homeroom teacher, is really nice but sometimes she **loses** her temper. **For** the first fifteen minutes she reads a book to us. **It's** called *The Secret Garden*, **and** it's really mysterious.

In science it's pretty fun. **This** week we're planning on doing a video on littering in Texas. **The** boys were thinking of doing a rap. It's gonna be fun! Our teacher is Coach Manny. **We** call him coach because he's our PE coach.

I'm a very good student. **In** September we took a test at the university because our teacher **recommended** my friend and **me**. We both passed. **My** friend was able to take **French** lessons there but I couldn't because my mother couldn't afford it.

When I grow up I want to be a fashion **coordinator.** I want to be able to take mother places she couldn't afford.

Your friend,

Lauren

Ideas for Friendly Letters

Your child can get ideas for friendly letters by keeping a journal and jotting down things as they happen. Just start listing ideas that will interest the person you plan to write to.

Vacation was more fun than I thought it would be.
We saw tall mountains.
We saw one skunk and about a million chipmunks.
Dad had to fix a flat tire.
My little brother threw up all over the back seat.

Here are some topics for friendly letters. As with any composition, it helps to decide on a central idea and organize your writing to keep this idea in focus.

- Describing places you visited
- Telling about things you did
- Telling what happened in school
- Telling what happened at home
- Writing an invitation to a birthday party
- Sending a thank-you letter
- Telling about a book or a movie you liked
- Telling a joke you heard or a story you read
- Writing to pen-pals in another state or country

Add any more topics or ideas you can think of.

_____

_____

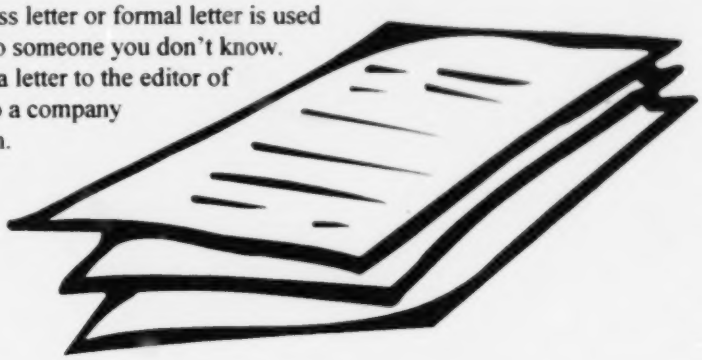
_____

_____

For additional ideas on friendly letters, see the book *"With Love, Grandma."* Published by the Family Learning Association.

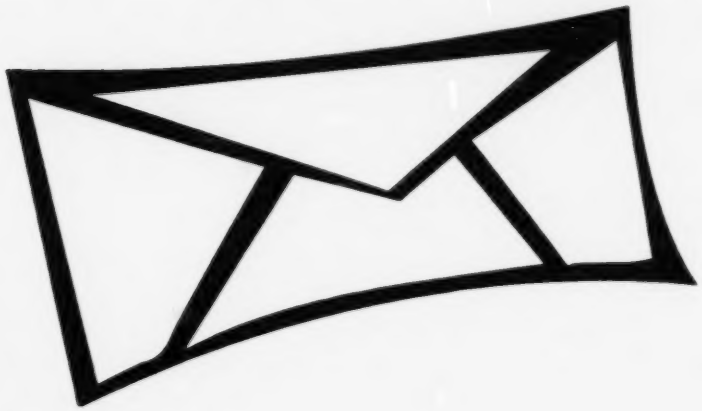
Business Letters

A business letter or formal letter is used when you write to someone you don't know. You might write a letter to the editor of a newspaper or to a company to get information.



A formal business letter follows almost the same format as a friendly letter, but it does have one additional section. This is called the **inside address**, that is, the address of the person who receives the letter.

In the greeting, you may not know the name of the person you are writing to. If you want to contact the Manager or Director of a company or someone who holds a particular title, you can use that title for the greeting: *Dear Manager; Dear Director;* and so on.



Business letters are often written in a slightly different design on the page. In the *block style*, every section of the business letter begins at the left margin. There is also a space between paragraphs. Here is an example:

Heading	456 Adams St. Chicago, IL 98765 Oct. 14, 1998
Inside Address	Editor, *The Waldo Beacon* 765 Main St. Waldo, IN 56789
Greeting	Dear Editor:
Body	Recently you had an article about penguins in your paper. I don't remember the exact date, but I think it was earlier this month. Can you tell me when this article was printed in your paper? Would it be possible for me to get a copy of the article or of the paper for that date? Also, can you tell me where the author of the article got most of the information? I am writing about penguins for school and I would like to find out more.
Closing	Sincerely,
Signature	Jeff Atkins

Format for Business Letters

Use the following outline to practice writing business letters. Make more copies of this page if you like.

Heading

_____

_____

_____

Inside Address

_____

_____

_____

Greeting

_____

Body

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Closing

_____

Signature

_____

Students' Business Letters

Here are some formal letters that were written by students in the elementary grades. The first letter is by a third-grader writing to tell me about a book she liked. The Greeting is a bit fanciful, but the letter is very interesting. For practice, you can look through this and circle and correct.

1243 Liberty St.
Hoppage, NY 67564
Jan. 9, 1998

Mr. Carl B. Smith
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 34256

Dear Mrs. B. Smith

I enjoyed your book Rhymes and Reasons. My forite story is the Medal I liked that story becouse of the mectal that the man got and when Sarah Ida said it was just a peice of Meatal. The other story that I liked was The Wacky Bike. that story relley enjoyed it had a lot of waky stunts easecly when they made Spences bike into a very onucaul bike. The that excinting is when they used Spences bike to give kids rides around the block. Well I liked bothe storys well thank you writing the book.

Your firend
Maureen R.

Now write a corrected version for practice. See if you can figure out the misspellings and the missing words. (Just rewrite the body of the letter on your own paper.)

✔ *Check your work*

Here is a corrected version. Some suggestions for missing words have been supplied in [brackets], although your version may differ. Corrections are given in **boldface**. Also, remember that book titles are written in italics (or underlined) and the titles of short stories are given in quotation marks.

Dear Mr. Smith

I enjoyed your book *Rhymes and Reasons*. My **favorite** story is "The Medal." I liked that story **because** of the **medal** that the man got and when Sarah Ida said it was just a **piece** of **metal**.

The other story that I liked was "The Wacky Bike." That story **[I] really** enjoyed. **It** had a lot of **wacky** stunts, **especially** when they made Spence's bike into a very **unusual** bike. The **[thing]** that **[is] exciting** is when they used Spence's bike to give kids rides around the block. Well, I liked **both stories. Well,** thank you **[for]** writing the book.

Your **friend**
Maureen R.

The following letter was written by fourth-grade students. It was sent to textbook publishers in an attempt to simplify the English language, especially spelling. See if you agree with them.

Elmwood School District
145 Grove Avenue
Elmwood, NY 12345

Supreme Publishers
456 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 54321

Dear Editors,

We are 4th grade students. My friend and I agreed to write this letter. We think the English language is hard to read and spell. Kids read things the way they are spelled. For example, photograph sounds like potograp. That really confuses a little kid or even a fourth grade kid like me. We have written a petition asking people to change some of the hard words.

We have a list of the hard words and a petition signed by many of the students in our school.

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,
Heather F.
Jessica T.

On a separate page, a list of words was added to back up the request in the letter.

Words we think should be changed.

The Way It Is:	**The Way It Should Be:**
nervous	nervus
said	sed
they	thay
friend	frend
why	y
you	u
blond/blonde	blond
could	cud
special	speshul
photograph	fotograf
know	no

The next letter is by a fifth-grader. You can see that it has few mistakes and follows the plan for a formal letter very well.

45 James Road
Weymouth, MA 45456
January 14, 1998

Ms. Ann Jones
Major Publishing Co.
456 Third Ave.
New York, NY 98789

Dear. Ms. Jones:

I really like your fifth grade Reading Book. It has nice pictures in it. My favorite poem is Between Birthdays by Ogden Nash. I think this book teaches us a lot of things like what a gaffer was. I think that it is good that you put biographys in this book too. I think this is the best Reading book I every read. I hope you come out with other books too. Please write back.

Your friend,
Christina R.
Hunt School
Weymouth, MA

Would you make different paragraphs in this letter to make your message clearer? Why?

Ideas for Business Letters

Here are some places and people you might write to:

- A company asking for information about a product
- A newspaper asking for information about something it printed
- An editor expressing an opinion to be printed in the paper
- A star of sports or entertainment telling them you like them
- A government official expressing an opinion
- A business explaining a problem or voicing a complaint

Add any other ideas you may have.

Guidelines for Writing Any Kind of Letter

When you write a friendly letter or a business letter, it is a good idea to do some planning and to work out a rough draft so that the finished letter will be clearly organized. Then your letter should be checked so that it won't contain any mistakes. On the next page you will find a procedure you can follow.

Guidelines for Letter Writing

1. Decide who will receive your letter and why you are writing.
- Is it a friend, or someone you don't know?
- Do you want to have a conversation and ask for a reply?
- Do you want to get some information or express an opinion?
- Do you just want to send the person some information?

2. Get ready to write.
- Decide which kind of letter suits your purpose.
- Gather the information you want to include in your letter.
- Make an outline.

3. Write a draft.
- Write the first version in a natural style.
- Follow your outline, and devote a paragraph to each of the points you included in your outline.

4. Revise your draft.
- Make sure you have included all the information.
- Make sure the organization is clear to the reader.
- Follow the letter format you decided on.

5. Correct your draft.
- Correct all spelling mistakes and other errors.
- Type or write your letter neatly.

9

Writing about Literature

After you read a story you like, you probably want to tell others about it. You want them to know how good it is and you want them to read it, too.

Writing about the stories and books you read can have another value as well. One of the best ways to understand and remember anything is to *put it into your own words*. One way to do this is to make notes as you read, but your notes shouldn't simply repeat what is in the book. Instead, your notes should tell how *you* understand something or how you feel about it.

When you write about something you have read, you don't want to tell the story all over again. Instead, you want to let others know what was good about it and why they should read it.

What Should You Notice as You Read?

As you are reading, jot down things that catch your attention. A few suggestions are given on the next three pages. Feel free to make more copies of these pages so that your child can have a copy for each story or book.

Notes about My Reading

1. What is the story about?

2. What are the main events? You may want to hint at some of the interesting things that happen, but keep the ending a secret.

3. How do you react to the story? Do you like it or not? Why?

4. What is especially interesting about the story?

5. Are there pictures? How do they make the story more interesting?

Prompts for Writing about Literature

In addition to the general guidelines just given, keep the following questions in mind while reading.

- How did the author keep you interested?
- Is this like any other story you have read? How?
- What do you know now that you didn't know before you read?
- What would you like to ask the author?
- Are there pictures? How do they make the story more interesting?
- What did you think of the ending?
- Were some sections of the story especially good for giving descriptions or expressing feelings, action, characters, etc? Jot them down here or record them in your journal.

Sentence Starters for Book Reviews

Here are some more suggestions that can help you get started. Pick the sentence starters that fit the story you've just read, and complete each sentence with your own thoughts.

It seems that

I now understand

If I were

I like the way

I was surprised that

I wondered why the author

What impressed me most was

This story (or character) reminded me of

When this happens to me, I feel

Using Quotation Marks and Italics for Titles

When you write the titles of poems, short stories, and books, you should be careful to let the reader know that these *are* titles. Here are ways to do this.

- The title of a poem is usually given in quotation marks.

  I like "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll.

- Quotation marks are also used for the title of a short story.

  Edgar Allan Poe wrote "The Fall of the House of Usher."

- Italics are used for the titles of long stories that take up a complete book.

  I read *Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain.

- You can underline the titles of books if you don't have a way to make italics.

  I want to read Ramona the Pest by Beverly Cleary.

If you list several titles in one sentence, then each one should be enclosed in quotation marks or written in italics. Be sure to put a quotation mark at the beginning and the end of each title.

If there are two titles, use the word *and* to join them. If there are more than two titles, then commas should be used to separate them. Also, quotation marks are placed after punctuation marks such as commas and periods.

I read Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn.*

O. Henry wrote "The Gift of the Magi," "The Ransom of Red Chief," and "The Fool-Killer."

Think of Your Reader . . .
What Should the Reader Know?

When you write a report to let other people know about a story, you want to include comments that will help them understand why you liked the story. Here are some suggestions for making notes; see if you can think of other items of your own.

- Main characters: Who are they? Do you like them?

- Setting: Is it an interesting place?

- Most important events (without giving away the ending):

- Things you think another reader will enjoy in the story:

What Is Important to Me?

When you write about a story, you can also tell about things that were important to you. You already know the characters' names and the setting and the plot, so you don't have to talk about those. Instead, write about the personal things that were important to you, for example, what made you happy or sad?

You can tell about the characters you liked, the events that stood out, and the things you learned. You can tell about parts of the story that reminded you of things that have happened to you, things that other people might not know about.

Here are some ways to begin your response; add more of your own.

What is important to me?

I like this character best because:

This character reminded me of someone I know:

The part I liked best was this one because:

This part reminded me of another story because:

This part reminded me of something that happened to me:

Challenge Activity: Student Reports about Literature

Here is a composition by a fourth-grader writing about favorite stories and books. After you have read it once, go back and see how you might want to revise and proofread it. Circle and correct any errors you find, and use the letter **P** to indicate the places at which you think a new paragraph should begin. Then rewrite the story on your own paper.

My Favorite Books

The kind of stories I like to read are mainly horror stories. I am currently working on Bram Stoker's "Dracula". I like Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masqe of Red Death. Hop-Frog, and The Tell-Tale Heart or The Vulture Eye." I like John Bellairs, and have his entire collection of Gothic horror novels for children. I have classics like Frankenstein and Ivanhoe. I also like comical horror stories like "My Freind the Vampire" and its sequal "The Vampire Moves In." Other kinds of books I like are Conan the Barbarion comic books. The Wind in the Willows, The World Book Encyclopidia, and The New Dinosaur Dictionary. I like O'Henry's "Ransom of Red Chief, Holding Up a Train, and The Fool Killer."

I have two book on legends and myths. I like books on science, and sci-fi movies also.

✔ ***Check your work***

Here is the same paper with corrections given in **boldface**. It has been grouped into paragraphs, but opinions can vary as to where breaks should come. Was your version close to this one?

My Favorite Books

The kind of stories I like to read are mainly horror stories. I am currently working on Bram Stoker's **Dracula**. I like Edgar Allan Poe's "The **Masque** of Red Death," "Hop-Frog," and "The Tell-Tale Heart or The Vulture Eye."

I like John Bellairs and have his entire collection of Gothic horror novels for children. I have classics like **Frankenstein** and **Ivanhoe**. I also like comical horror stories like "My **Friend** the Vampire" and its **sequel,** "The Vampire Moves In."

Other kinds of books I like are "Conan the **Barbarian"** comic books, **The Wind in the Willows**, **The World Book Encyclopedia**, and **The New Dinosaur Dictionary**. I like O'Henry's "Ransom of Red **Chief,"** "Holding Up a Train," and "The Fool Killer."

I have two book on legends and myths. I like books on science, and sci-fi movies also.

Here is a reaction to Beverly Cleary's books by a fourth-grade student. It contains many good ideas, and the author obviously enjoys Beverly Cleary's books. After you have read it, go back and mark the places at which new paragraphs could begin. Also circle and correct other errors. Then you can write your corrected version on your own paper.

Beverly Clearys Books

Beverly Cleary is a very fantastic childrens aurthor. Most of Mrs. Clearys books are mostly about two sisters Beezus and Ramona and thier friend Henry Huggins. She writes about thier life. Personely my favorite is Beezus and Ramona thier are alot more besides just that one for enstents thier is Ribsy, and alot more. Its very injoyable to sit and read a good book over the weekend or on a rainy day. What I like about her books are they seem to be about your life and everything. Her books help you deal with proplems and dreams. They tell you how to start kindigarden and how to go about things. Beverly Cleary is one of the best loved children's aurthor around. Every library has at least one. My school library and the public one has the whole set of Beverly Clearys books. Her books have excitment, maddness, sad times, special times, and family love. Checck out Beverly Clearys books at your library.

✔ *Check your work*

Is this close to your version? Here is a revised and proofread version of the same paper. The division into paragraphs can vary, depending on how you decide to group ideas. Mistakes are corrected in **boldface**. In a few places, words have been added or deleted to make things clearer.

Beverly Cleary's Books

Beverly Cleary is a fantastic **children's author**. Most of Mrs. Cleary's books are about two sisters, Beezus and Ramona, and **their** friend, Henry Huggins. She writes about **their** life.

Personally my favorite is Beezus and Ramona. **There** are **a lot** more besides just that one. **For instance, there** is Ribsy, and **a lot** more. **It's** very **enjoyable** to sit and read a good book over the weekend or on a rainy day.

I like her books because they seem to be about your life and everything. Her books help you deal with **problems** and dreams. They tell you how to start **kindergarten** and how to go about things.

Beverly Cleary is one of the **best-loved** children's **authors** around. Every library has at least one **of her books**. My school library and the public one has the whole set of Beverly Cleary's books. Her books have **excitement**, **madness**, sad times, special times, and family love. **Check** out Beverly Cleary's books at your library.

Guidelines for Revising Compositions

Use the following questions to revise a composition, either an original work or someone else's. Make notes here in addition to any marks you make on the composition itself.

1. Is this composition clear and easy to read?

2. What are the good points? Why?

3. What spots are not clear? Circle each problem area so you can correct it when you write a revision.

4. What sections need to be eliminated? Cross them out.

5. What sections need to be improved by adding more information? Circle them and add the information.

10

Writing Stories

If you were to ask a child in the early grades to write a story, what would you expect to see? Left to their own devices, young children can usually make up a fairly good story or retell one they have heard or read. Even their simplest stories usually give a series of events in chronological order.

Here is a story written by a third-grade student. It was written "on the spot" without any chance to revise or proofread. Even so, it has some good points. Circle and correct the problems you see.

the ougle Duckly [Ugly Duckling]

Once a uond [upon] a time there is a duck that lived in a ducks nest when he hached all of the babys ones hade yollow fethers on but he wasn't like the other ones thay all laugfh atrt him and called him names and when thay go dowen to the pound the olg ducklyer folod then thay got mad at him and when he look at him on the water he was sckert a little when he look at him he saeen it he was no duck and he begen to cry but when he was crying some little swany [swans] came and he stoped crying he had the same sound as the little duck and thin he got in the pond but the mother swonge pold out her whengs and gave the ogle ducklyen a huge [hug] and thay played happly ever after.

In many ways this is very well done in spite of all the errors. In particular, it contains the elements found in most stories:

1. The scene is set.
2. A central character or several characters are introduced.
3. A situation or problem is presented for the characters to deal with.
4. The characters go through a series of events.
5. The events reach an end and the problem is resolved (even if the ending is only "They lived happily ever after").

For a third-grader, this is a well-organized, imaginative story. On the other hand, this retelling of "The Ugly Duckling" is obviously difficult to read. The many misspellings can be corrected, and of course it can be organized into paragraphs. Look at the same story after it has been revised and proofread.

The **Ugly Duckling**

Once **upon** a time there **was** a duck that lived in a duck's nest. When he **hatched** all of the **baby** ones **had yellow feathers** on but he wasn't like the other ones. **They** all **laughed at** him and called him names

When **they went down** to the **pond** the **ugly duckling followed. Then they** got mad at him and when he **looked** at **himself** on the water he was **scared** a little. When he **looked** at **himself** he **saw** it he was no duck and he **began** to cry.

But when he was crying some little **swans** came and he **stopped** crying. **They** had the same sound as the little duck. And **then** he got in the pond. But the mother **swan pulled** out her **wings** and gave the **ugly duckling** a **hug.** And thay played **happily** ever after.

Not every third-grader can be expected to correct all the technical errors and problems that have been cleared up in our revised version. The goal at this point is simply to help your child see that there are some misspellings and other

mistakes that make the story difficult to follow. Our revised and corrected version provides a chance to see the difference between the first draft and the final product.

Your child can learn to correct some of these errors now, but don't expect him to grasp everything at once. As you go along, prompt him to review his compositions, first looking for possible spelling errors and then for other things that will make the writing clear for the reader.

First Drafts

In this chapter we will look at a number of stories to see what children actually write when they *don't* have a chance to write several drafts and revise them. By working on these examples, you will see how much they could be improved by a little planning and a lot more attention to correcting errors. By the fourth or fifth grade, students can write much better stories if they apply the ideas on prewriting, drafting, and revising that we have discussed in this book.

On the following pages, use each story as a worksheet to practice revising and proofreading. Select those stories that suit your child's stage of development and then work on them. You may wish to discuss the story as a whole before asking your child to correct errors and make necessary changes. If your child is older but still has problems with spelling, punctuation, or organization, you may want to use simpler compositions when you begin. You may turn this into a challenge: "Let's pretend you are helping a third-grader. How would you make this story better?"

Simple Narratives

Children like to write **narratives**, stories in which they tell about things that actually happened or that could happen in real life. Often the child will make himself or herself the central character in such stories.

In the early grades, stories often consist of a string of events: "The characters did this and they did that and they did something else and then they went home." Here is an example of such a story by a third-grade student.

The Kitten And The Bunny

Once upon a time a bunny was in a garden. She ate and ate and ate. A little cat came out and said you ate my owners garden. But all the bunny did was sit down and moan. Then she mumbled I was hungry. That night the cat didn't sleep because she was thinking about the bunny. The next day the bunny came back. That day the bunny became the cat's friend. They played together and had fun together. The next day they went for a walk. While they were walking, the cat said it's getting dark. All of the sudden a shrew jumped on the bunny. The cat jumped on it and it ran away. Then they went home. The boy who owned the cat asked to keep the bunny. The mother said keep it in the cat's cage for now. Later she said you can keep it. The next day they went to the park. A shrew was getting closer to the bunny. They saw it and stepped on it. Then he said I think we better get home. From then on the boy protected the bunny and they all lived hapily ever after.

There are not many technical mistakes here, especially for a third-grader. The story could be improved by dividing it into paragraphs, and there are some spots that could be presented as conversation between characters. We will talk about these aspects as we go along.

Read Each Example as a Story

As you and your child read the preceding story, don't start with the technical mistakes. Instead, talk about it *as a story* and ask general questions such as the following.

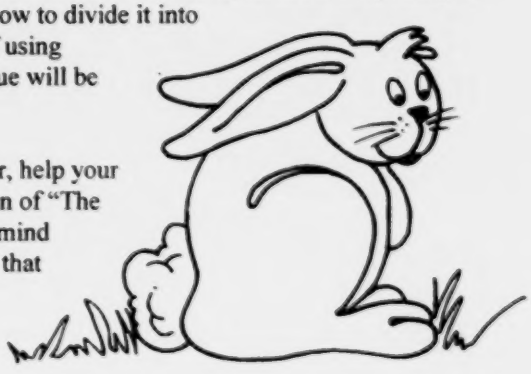
- Who are the main characters?
- What are the main events in the story?
- How does the story end?
- What did you like about the story? Are there any parts you would have done differently?
- Is the story hard to understand at any point? How could it be organized more clearly?

The first three questions help your child focus on the most important things: Who is in the story? What happens to them? How does the story end?

The last two questions can help guide you as you decide how the story can be organized and made clearer to the reader. As you have seen in earlier chapters, it helps to begin a new paragraph for each important new event. This is especially true when characters are talking to each other; each character's spoken lines should be given in a single paragraph.

This story has been printed with lots of space to allow you to use it as a worksheet. Ask your child to mark the most obvious errors in spelling and punctuation. Also decide how to divide it into paragraphs. (The details of using quotation marks for dialogue will be discussed a bit later.)

On your own paper, help your child write a revised version of "The Kitten and the Bunny." Remind your child of the questions that you just asked.



✔ *A Revision of "The Kitten and the Bunny"*

After your child has finished, look at the following revision of this story. Compare your version and see which you like better. Your ideas on paragraph structure may be different from the ones you see here. Also notice how quotation marks are used to show that each character is speaking. Point this out to your child as you look at this version.

The Kitten And The Bunny

Once upon a time a bunny was in a garden. She ate and ate and ate. A little cat came out and said, **"You** ate my **owner's** garden. But all the bunny did was sit down and moan. Then she mumbled, **"**I was hungry."

That night the cat didn't sleep because she was thinking about the bunny. The next day the bunny came back. That day the bunny became the cat's friend. They played together and had fun together.

The next day they went for a walk. While they were walking, the cat said, **It's** getting dark." All of **a** sudden a shrew jumped on the bunny. The cat jumped on it and it ran away. Then they went home.

The boy who owned the cat asked to keep the bunny. The mother said, **"Keep** it in the cat's cage for now." Later she said, **"You** can keep it."

The next day they went to the park. A shrew was getting closer to the bunny. They saw it and stepped on it. Then he said, **"I** think we better get home." From then on the boy protected the bunny and they all lived hapily ever after.

The division into paragraphs helps make the story easier to read. The quotation marks help even more by letting the reader know when somebody is speaking.

Using Quotation Marks to Write Dialogue

The word *dialogue* refers to a conversation between two or more characters. When you write dialogue, you show that characters are speaking to each other.

Here is the way a single line of dialogue is presented in a story. Notice the parts in **boldface**.

He said, **"Let's** see what's over there."

From this example you can see how dialogue should be written:

- When you begin the sentence with words such as *He said* or *She said*, a comma should be placed after the word *said*.
- A quotation mark is placed just before the first spoken word.
- The spoken passage begins with a capital letter because it is the beginning of a new complete sentence.
- The period or question mark or exclamation mark is followed by another quotation mark to show that the spoken line has ended.

When the words *he said* or *she said* are used after the spoken passage, then the guidelines change a bit.

"Here is the book you wanted," she said.

When a spoken passage runs for several lines, a quotation mark is used only at the beginning and end of the whole passage, not for every sentence. If the spoken part is interrupted by words such as *he said* or *she said*, then the next spoken section begins with its own quotation mark.

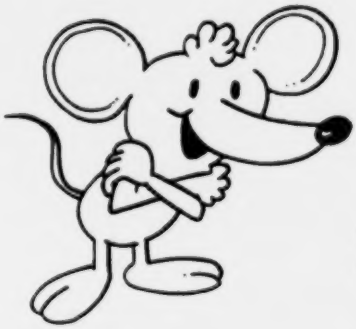
"Let's go over there and look around," she said. "We might find something interesting. Besides, we still have an hour to wait before we go home."

Whenever a new character speaks in a story, a new paragraph should begin. Here is an example showing characters talking to each other:

"I don't know where we are," the rabbit said.

The mouse replied, "We'll just have to ask somebody. Maybe this wise old owl will know something."

"He doesn't look very wise to me," said the rabbit.



"Well, you never know about owls," answered the mouse. "Some of them are smarter than they look."

A Fourth-Grade Composition

The next story is by a fourth-grade student. It is well organized, but it does have some spelling errors. If your child understands the use of quotation marks, ask her to see if they are employed correctly in this story.

Teddy the Cat

Once apone a time there was a girl named Beth. She wanted a stray cat her aunt had found in her yard. She wanted his name to be Teddy but her brother and her uncle wanted to call it Freddy. But then Beth wanted to call her best fan Jon Bonjovi. He said, "Teddy is a good name for a cat."

But after Beth hung the phone up she just remembered that somebody mite still clame the cat. She told everybody it was not her cat yet so she could not name it for her own.

For two weeks she would forever hold her piece. Then all of a sudden she got a phone call, it was her aunt. Her aunt said, "No one clamed the cat." I asked her, "Doe's that meen its mine." She said, "If you want it Its your's." So she named it Teddy and loved it and took it everywhere she went.

As with all these examples, first talk with your child about the story itself:

- Who are the main characters?
- What did they do?
- How did the story end?
- Did you like the story? What are the best parts?
- Would you change anything about the story?

This story has clear paragraph structure, and dialogue among characters is set off with quotation marks. This story shows a marked improvement over the third-grade example. All it really needs is a close proofreading to correct all spelling errors. Circle and correct the errors and then write a corrected version on your own paper.

✔ *A Revision of "Teddy the Cat"*

Here is one way to revise and proofread this story. See how it compares with yours.

Teddy the Cat

Once **upon** a time there was a girl named Beth. She wanted a stray cat her aunt had found in her yard. She wanted his name to be Teddy but her brother and her uncle wanted to call it Freddy. But then Beth wanted to call her best fan Jon Bonjovi. He said, "Teddy is a good name for a cat."

But after Beth hung the phone up she just remembered that somebody **might** still **claim** the cat. She told everybody it was not her cat yet so she could not name it for her own.

For two weeks she would forever hold her **peace**. Then all of a sudden she got a phone call**. It** was her aunt. Her aunt said, "No one **claimed** the cat." I asked her, "**Does** that **mean it's** mine." She said, "If you want it**, it's yours**." So she named it Teddy and loved it and took it everywhere she went.

In the last paragraph, children may not be familiar with the phrase "hold her *peace*," meaning to remain silent. Also, the word *its* is used incorrectly in two places near the end. The word should be *it's*, meaning *it is*. In the contraction *it's*, the apostrophe takes the place of the first letter in the word *is*.

Stories of Fantasy and Imagination

Some children like to write the kind of narrative that can happen only in the imagination, not in real life. In this kind of story, the writer may also be the main character even though the events are not realistic. Here is an example by a third-grade student.

Tiger

Tiger is a little mouse. I met him when I was walking. I just about stepped on him when he said, "stop, don't step on me." I looked down and saw a little tiny mouse. I said, "who are you?" The little mouse looked up at me with fear and responded "My name's Tiger." "Hello Tiger," I said. "My name's Kyle." "I won't hurt you, OK." "Jump up on my hand and you can walk with me." When we were walking we met an alley cat. "My name's Ralph, and give me the mouse, NOW!" "I won't." You ought to be ashamed of your self." "Not fair," I said I started throwing rocks at him. Soon Ralph was out of sight. "Well," I said, "He's gone." "We better get home." When we got home, mom was sitting on the couch sewing. "Tiger," I said. "You'll half [have] to get in my pocket or get swept up by a broom." "Put me in your pocket." We got up to my room. Then I drilled a hole in my wall and Tiger and I were happy for the rest of our lives.

Talk through this story with your child. Emphasize the good points that make it effective: characters, setting, events, and an ending that resolves the problem. Here are some questions you might ask:

- Who are the main characters?
- What did they do?
- How did the story end?
- Did you like the story? What are the best parts?

After this discussion, turn to some of the technical factors your child may consider in a revised version:

- How could you divide this into paragraphs? Put a big letter **P** each time you think a new paragraph should begin.
- Are there any other things you would correct in order to make this story easier to read? Put a circle around any errors and write the corrections above each one.

Now write your own revised and proofread version of "Tiger," separating paragraphs to make the story clear to the reader. Also notice the use of quotation marks for dialogue. At a few points the writer uses quotation marks for every sentence even though the same character is still speaking. Review the section on "Using Quotation Marks to Write Dialogue" given earlier. Clear up the sentences that are all spoken by the same character.

✔ A Revision of "Tiger"

Here is one way to revise "Tiger." Notice how the paragraphs and quotation marks help the reader tell who is speaking.

Tiger

Tiger is a little mouse. I met him when I was walking. I just about stepped on him when he said, "**Stop**, don't step on me!"

I looked down and saw a little tiny mouse. I said, "**Who** are you?"

The little mouse looked up at me with fear and responded, "My name's Tiger."

"Hello, Tiger," I said. "My name's Kyle. I won't hurt you, OK. Jump up on my hand and you can walk with me."

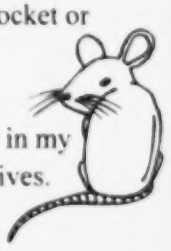
When we were walking we met an alley cat. "My name's Ralph," **said the cat,** "and give me the mouse, NOW!"

"I won't. You ought to be ashamed of **yourself**. Not fair," I said. I started throwing rocks at him. Soon Ralph was out of sight. "Well," I said, "He's gone. We better get home."

When we got home, mom was sitting on the couch sewing. "Tiger," I said. "You'll **have** to get in my pocket or get swept up by a broom."

"Put me in your pocket," **Tiger said.**

We got up to my room. Then I drilled a hole in my wall and Tiger and I were happy for the rest of our lives.



Stories by Fourth-Grade Students

Here is another example, called a "fancied story" by its fourth-grade author. Read it along with your child and then talk about it.

Powers!

I like Fancied stories. I like them because they're never boring and it lets me imagine whats going on. Here's a story of my own.

One day I was walking in the park and I sat down under a tree. As I sat a small dog came up. I looked at him and thought, "he must be lost I wonder if I should take him home with me." The dog answered me, "OK take me home with you. I don't want to go back to my house because my master always yells at me, and beats on me." The dog's answer was strange because the dog hadn't moved his mouth. I thought "I wonder how that little dog can understand me." The dog answered "We just have to think what we want to say and the other understands it. even if" "you mean" I interuppted "that I have a extraordinary power?" "Well" he answered "I wouldent call our power extraordinary, but it is speicel." "Well" I said after a bit. "Tell me where you live and I'll see about bying you." "OK" he said cautiosly. "Come on." I said exitedly. "Lets go!" "Ah. we're here at last" I said after about a haf an hour. I went inside and the dog stayed out on the porch. When I came out I jumped up and down grabbed the dog and ran down the street and said "I can have you I don't have to by you!" The dog answered, "Hey be careful I am not steele you know" When I got home I fed him some food and he said, "I am very comfortable here. I know I'll be happy." And we have been very happy together to this very day.

Ask questions similar to those suggested with earlier examples. Start with your child's reaction to the story itself; leave the technical details for later. Through revision and proofreading, the errors can be corrected at a later time.

This story follows a clear plan of development that sustains the reader's interest, but it needs to be made clearer for the reader. After you have read it, consider how you might write a revised, corrected version.

- ❖ How could you divide this into paragraphs? Put a big letter **P** each time you think a new paragraph should begin.
- ❖ Are there any other things you would correct in order to make this story easier to read? Put a circle around any errors and write the corrections above each one. Then write a revised version on your own paper.

✔ *A Revision of "Powers!"*

Here is one way to revise and correct this story.

Powers!

I like **fancied** stories. I like them because they're never boring and **they let** me imagine what's going on. Here's a story of my own.

One day I was walking in the park and I sat down under a tree. As I sat a small dog came up. I looked at him and thought, "**He** must be lost. I wonder if I should take him home with me."

The dog answered me. "OK, take me home with you. I don't want to go back to my house because my master always yells at me, and beats on me."

The dog's answer was strange because the dog hadn't moved his mouth. I thought, "I wonder how that little dog can understand me."

The dog answered, "We just have to think what we want to say and the other understands it. **Even if . . .**"

extraordinary power?"

"Well," he answered, "I **wouldn't** call our power extraordinary, but it is **special**."

"Well," I said after a bit, "tell me where you live and I'll see about **buying** you."

"OK," he said **cautiously**.

"Come on," I said **excitedly**. "Lets go!"

"Ah. We're here at last," I said after about a **half** an hour. I went inside and the dog stayed out on the porch. When I came out, I jumped up and down, grabbed the dog, and ran down the street and said, "I can have you! I don't have to **buy** you!"

The dog answered, "Hey, be careful! I am not **steel**, you know!"

When I got home I fed him some food and he said, "I am very comfortable here. I know I'll be happy." And we have been very happy together to this very day.

How does your version compare with this one? Talk about any differences you might find, and decide which you prefer.

Here is another fourth-grade story. This one uses paragraphs and dialogue to help the reader understand what is happening. It also has a very clever twist, as you will see.

Vegetables, Vegetables

Over and over again, my parents told me to eat all of the vegetables on my plate or I wouldn't grow up big and strong. For weeks and weeks, I stuffed my face with lima bean, brussels sprouts, and carrots because I wanted to be tall and powerful. Then one day, the strangest thing happened at school, all of the sudden in the middle of math I disapeered and found myself in a weard place. all the tree's grew ham, steak, and mutch more kinds of meat even chicken's grew on the tree's!

After a while someone pulled me into the bushes. They had carrots for arms, legs, feet, fingers, and a neck. They had brussels sprouts for hair, and lima beans for the head.

I asked why they looked so weard they said "You look the same as me." I looked at myself I was made of vegetables just like him.

I asked him how I got there and he said "quiet or the meat men will here us."

The next thing I new he was pulling me. After running from meat men all day we came to a cottage.

We went inside and went through a secret door and up some stairs at the top of the stairs there was a big empty room We went through another secret door and down about 4 times as many stairs as we went up.

At the bottom of the stairs there was a large room.

Finaly the other person made of vegetables said we were safe.

That night we went through another secret passege and ended up coming out of a ham tree. We then went into a secret door going into a steak tree. And finally we were there at the warp window.

I said goodbye and stepped into the window. The next thing I new I was back at school and it was the same time as when I got zapped or whatever you want to call into the planet food.

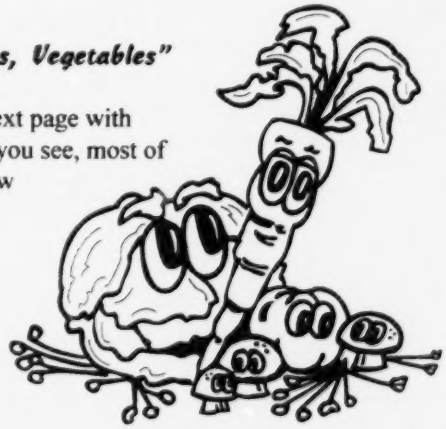
And every day after that durring math I always had another adventure and allways returned at the same time.

This is unusually imaginative because the writer not only encounters characters made of vegetables but also turns into one of them himself!

After you have talked about the general characteristics of this story, go back through it and circle any errors you see. Write the corrections above the errors. Because the overall organization and paragraph structure is good, you won't have to rewrite this story.

✔ *A Revision of "Vegetables, Vegetables"*

Here is a version on the next page with corrections given in **boldface**. As you see, most of the errors are in spelling, with a few problems in punctuation and capitalization.



Vegetables, Vegetables

Over and over again, my parents told me to eat all of the vegetables on my plate or I wouldn't grow up big and strong. For weeks and weeks, I stuffed my face with lima beans, Brussels sprouts, and carrots because I wanted to be tall and powerful. Then one day, the strangest thing happened at school. **All** of **a** sudden in the middle of math I **disappeared** and found myself in a **weird** place. **All** the **trees** grew ham, steak, and **much** more kinds of meat. **Even chickens** grew on the **trees**!

After a while someone pulled me into the bushes. They had carrots for arms, legs, feet, fingers, and a neck. They had Brussels sprouts for hair, and lima beans for the head.

I asked why they looked so **weird** they said, "You look the same as me." I looked at myself I was made of vegetables just like him.

I asked him how I got there and he said, "Quiet or the meat men will **hear** us."

The next thing I **knew** he was pulling me. After running from meat men all day we came to a cottage.

We went inside and went through a secret door and up some stairs. **At** the top of the stairs there was a big empty room. We went through another secret door and down about **four** times as many stairs as we went up.

At the bottom of the stairs there was a large room.

Finally the other person made of vegetables said we were safe.

That night we went through another secret **passage** and ended up coming out of a ham tree. We then went into a secret door going into a steak tree. And finally we were there at the warp window.

I said goodbye and stepped into the window. The next thing I **knew** I was back at school and it was the same time as when I got zapped or whatever you want to call into the planet food.

And every day after that **during** math I always had another adventure and **always** returned at the same time.

Stories by Fifth-Grade Students

As with most of the stories we have seen so far, the next example shows a clear understanding of story structure. However, it very much needs to be organized into paragraphs, and there are many misspellings.

The Royal Teddy Bears

Once apon a time there was a poor tayler and his little boy. The boy had know mother because she had died in a fire two years ago.

One day the king of the town came to the tayler and said, please make me a royal robe. This robe is to small for a big man like me. So the tayler did. While he was cuting out the pattern the little boy asked if he could have the scraps to make something? And his father said Yes and gave the scraps to the boy. He sowed and cut and cut and sowed. Finaly the boy was finished, he had made a teddy bear. He was so proud of his work he showed the king. The king loved it so much he bought the teddy bear for his beautiful princess. Then all the children in the castle wanted one to. So the little boy made one for each of the children in the castle. Soon every body in town wanted a royal teddy bear so the boy made hundreds and sold them in the town square. Soon qfter a while people had stop coming and grew bord of the teddy bears. One day he came to the square to cell his teddy bears and the people through rotten food at him and stones. Right then and there he decided not make a teddy bear agian. Then one day he was taking a walk and he herd a girl crying. So he went over to her and asked, what is the matter, and she said she lost her cat. So the boy pulled out some treard [thread], a neadle, and some

cloth. The boy sewed, and he cut, and he cut and he sewed finaly he finished. He had made the lovleyest teddy bear in the world. He gave it to the little girl and said, this is better than a cat this is the worlds greatist teddy bear. Then the girl thanked the boy and left full of smiles. Then the boy went home feeling glad and joyous that his teddy bear brought smiles.

Use this version as a worksheet. Consider points such as these:

- Where would you begin new paragraphs? Mark these with the letter **P** and give your reasons.
- Are there other changes that would make this story clearer? Circle them and write in your changes. Then write a revised version on your own paper.

✔ A Revision of "The Royal Teddy Bears"

Here is one possible revision of the preceding story. The many spelling errors are corrected in **boldface**. You may have different ideas about where to begin new paragraphs. Decide which version you prefer.

The Royal Teddy Bears

Once **upon** a time there was a poor **tailor** and his little boy. The boy had **no** mother because she had died in a fire two years ago.

One day the king of the town came to the **tailor** and said, **"Please** make me a royal robe. This robe is **too** small for a big man like me." So the **tailor** did.

While he was **cutting** out the pattern the little boy asked if he could have the scraps to make something. And his father said "Yes" and gave the scraps to the boy. He **sewed** and cut and cut and **sewed**.

bear. He was so proud of his work he showed the king. The king loved it so much he bought the teddy bear for his beautiful princess.

Then all the children in the castle wanted one, **too**. So the little boy made one for each of the children in the castle. Soon **everybody** in town wanted a royal teddy bear, so the boy made hundreds and sold them in the town square.

After a while people **stopped** coming and grew **bored with** the teddy bears. One day he came to the square to **sell** his teddy bears and the people **threw** rotten food and stones at him. Right then and there he decided not make a teddy bear **again**.

Then one day he was taking a walk and he **heard** a girl crying. **He** went over to her and asked, **"What** is the matter**?"** and she said she lost her cat.

So the boy pulled out some **thread**, a **needle**, and some cloth. The boy sewed, and he cut, and he cut and he sewed**. Finally** he finished. He had made the **loveliest** teddy bear in the world.

He gave it to the little girl and said, **"This** is better than a cat**. This** is the **world's greatest** teddy bear. The girl thanked the boy and left full of smiles. Then the boy went home feeling glad and joyous that his teddy bear brought smiles.

In a few places, words such as *so* and *then* are deleted because there are too many of them. The story unfolds clearly enough without them.

Topics for Imaginative Stories

Children who like to write stories of imagination and fantasy can probably think of a number of interesting situations to write about. Here are a few subjects to consider:

- You fly in a space ship to another planet.
- You meet a big green monster on your way to school.
- You are a little animal in the forest.
- You are a big bird floating high overhead.
- The school bus starts flying through the air.
- You meet someone who is twenty feet tall and can run a hundred miles an hour.

Some imaginative stories—those that are called "Tall Tales"—often involve characters who are larger than life and perform heroic deeds or show great strength. ("Paul Bunyan" is a good example of this.) These stories also often have clever twists at the end.

The preceding stories often relied on descriptive language to make their effect. Notice how the writers use dialogue and various expressions to make their stories interesting. (For instance, at the beginning of "The Worst" you find this: "This morning was awful! The worst! YUCK!")

When you write such stories, let your imagination run free. Also, don't be afraid to experiment with language. When they work, use forceful expressions marked by exclamation points ("Yuck!"). Encourage children to write tall tales as an outlet their clever ideas and fantastic notions.

Stories That Solve a Problem

In many stories, the main characters don't just go through a series of events. Instead, they have to deal with a difficult situation and try to solve a problem. Here is a good example of such a story by a third-grader.

The Fire in the Jungle

Once upon a time in a magical jungle that was far far away there lived a unicorn. One morning while the unicorn was still sleeping a mouse crept in. the mouse jumped on the bed and cried wake up wake up! The unicorn was starteld. The mouse said hurry there's a fire in the jungle hurry there's no time for questions. Come on there's no time to waste we have to hurry! When they got there the fire was bigger. Quick said the mouse get an elaphant and fill his trunk. Whith what? asked the unicorn. Water now hurry. So the unicorn did what the mouse said. They got back and the elaphant spraded the water out of his trunk and put out the fire. And they all became heroes.

Talk with your child about this story, asking questions such as these:

- What is the setting? When and where does the story take place?
- Who are the main characters?
- What problem do they have to solve?
- What must they do to solve the problem?
- How does the story end?

After you have talked about this story, have your child mark errors and other changes that may be needed. Then rewrite the story on your own paper.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

✔ A Revision of "A Fire in the Jungle"

Here is one possible revision of this story.

The Fire in the Jungle

Once upon a time in a magical jungle far, far away there lived a unicorn. One morning while the unicorn was still sleeping a mouse crept in. **The** mouse jumped on the bed and cried, **"Wake** up, wake up!"

The unicorn was **startled**. The mouse said, **"Hurry! There's** a fire in the jungle. **Hurry! There's** there's no time for questions. Come on! **There's** no time to waste. **We** have to hurry!"

When they got there the fire was bigger. "Quick," said the mouse. **"Get** an **elephant** and fill his trunk."

"With what?" asked the unicorn.

"Water! **Now** hurry."

So the unicorn did what the mouse said. They got back and the **elephant sprayed** the water out of his trunk and put out the fire. And they all became heroes.

Historical Fiction by a Fifth-Grader

The following story by a fifth-grade student is well organized and uses imaginative language, but it is even more significant for another reason. The writer puts herself in the position of someone who lived in an earlier period—the Plymouth Colony founded in Massachusetts in 1620. She uses her knowledge of life at that time to develop a most effective story about a difficult situation that had to be dealt with.

The Near Disaster

It was a dark, freezing cold night. The wind was blowing fiercely around my small hut. My name is Anna. I came over with the first shipload of Puritans. There came a knock at the door. I got up from my rocker to answer it. I opened the door and a blast of icy wind came rushing in. In the doorway stood Governer Bradford. He explained why he had come. "I just wanted to make sure you were all right, Anna. It's a bad storm out there, you know. "Oh yes, Governer, I'm quite fine. Would you like to stay for some coffee? "Thank you, I think I will." I lead him to a chair and took his coat and hat and hung them on the peg by the door. Then, I made some coffee. We talked awhile until he said, "Well, I must be going. I have to make sure everyone else is alright. Thank you very much for the coffee. "Oh, you're quite welcome, Governer Bradford." "Are you sure you'll be alright." But that was not the truth. The truth was that I was very scared. What if the hut collapsed? What if I were killed? I knew there was a very slim chance of this happening. But I was still scared. I sat down in my rocker and read the Bible for a while. Then I got into my

nightdress and cap. In a few minutes I was in bed.

The next morning, the sun was shining brightly and birds were singing. I got up, dressed, and hurried outside. My goodness! The villiage was a shambles. Everyone was soon working, trying to salvage some of the damage. Some houses collapsed, and the church was a wreck. Everbody was rushing about, shouting and taking orders. I joined in.

In three weeks, we had most of the damage fixed. Our new church was almost done and most of the homes that had been damaged were fixed. I went back to my comfortable little hut and sat down. While I rested I thought, We were lucky to have been able to save most of our villiage. We might not have been able to do it at all! I was glad our town was back to normal.

You can talk through this story using the same questions that were suggested for "A Fire in the Jungle." Then use this double-spaced version to mark any changes you may want to make. You will want to use the letter **P** to mark new paragraphs. You may also want to change a few words or sentences to improve the story. Then write your revision on your own paper.

✔ *A Revision of "The Near Disaster"*

Here is a possible revision of this story.

The Near Disaster

It was a dark, freezing cold night. The wind was blowing fiercely around my small hut. My name is Anna. I came over with the first shipload of Puritans.

There came a knock at the door. I got up from my rocker to answer it. I opened the door and a blast of icy wind came rushing in. In the doorway stood **Governor** Bradford. He explained why he had come.

"I just wanted to make sure you were all right, Anna. It's a bad storm out there, you know."

"Oh yes, **Governor**, I'm quite fine. Would you like to stay for some coffee?"

"Thank you, I think I will."

I **led** him to a chair and took his coat and hat and hung them on the peg by the door. Then I made some coffee. We talked awhile until he said, "Well, I must be going. I have to make sure everyone else is **all right**. Thank you very much for the coffee."

"Oh, you're quite welcome, **Governor** Bradford."

"Are you sure you'll be **all right?**" But that was not the truth. The truth was that I was very scared. What if the hut collapsed? What if I were killed? I knew there was a very slim chance of this happening. But I was still scared. I sat down in my rocker and read the Bible for a while. Then I got into my nightdress and cap. In a few minutes I was in bed.

The next morning, the sun was shining brightly and birds were singing. I got up, dressed, and hurried outside. My goodness! The **village** was a shambles. Everyone was soon working, trying to salvage **as much as they could**. Some houses collapsed, and the church was a wreck. **Everybody** was rushing about, shouting and taking orders. I joined in.

In three weeks, we had most of the damage fixed. Our new church was almost done and most of the homes that had been damaged were fixed. I went back to my comfortable little hut and sat down. While I rested I thought, we were lucky to have been able to save most of our **village**. We might not have been able to do it at all! I was glad our town was back to normal.

Planning the Problem-Solving Story

Throughout this book we have suggested ways to get started and to write out the first draft of a composition. The same ideas work for stories as well.

If you look closely at "The Fire in the Jungle" and "The Near Disaster," you see the features usually found in most problem-solving stories.

Characteristics of Problem-solving Stories

Setting - Where and when does the story take place? What descriptions will help the reader imagine the setting?

Characters - Who is involved?

Problem - What problem do the characters have to deal with?

Events - What happens to move the story forward?

Resolution - How is the problem resolved?

When we looked at "The Fire in the Jungle," we suggested some questions to guide your discussion of that story. In fact, these same questions can provide a good guide for prewriting and working out the first draft of a problem-solving story.

Because such stories are more complicated than simple narratives, it helps to work out the major points in a prewriting guide. Make copies of the worksheet on the next page for your child to use when planning each problem-solving story.

Worksheet: Prewriting Guide for Problem-Solving Stories

Use this worksheet to make brief notes. Write down the most important points you want to include in your story. After you have worked out a logical plan, develop your ideas more fully in the story itself.

1. What is the setting? When and where does the story take place?

2. Who are the main characters? Which character is most concerned with the problem?

3. What problem must the characters solve? Make it clear.

4. What are the main events in the story? What do the characters do to solve the problem?

   First:

   Next:

   Then:

   Then:

   Then:

5. How do they finally solve the problem? How does the story end?

When you use a worksheet like this to plan your story, you have made a good start. After completing your prewriting guide, you are ready to write your first draft. Then revise it as many times as necessary. Remember to use dialogue when it is appropriate, and use clear paragraph structure to help the reader follow events. Finally, proofread the story to locate and correct all errors.

Now you are on your way to writing better compositions.

Dear Parent,

These ideas will get you started helping your children with their writing. If you do nothing else, accustom your children to review their writing by always asking two questions:

1. Is it clear?
2. How can I make it more interesting?

Gradually those questions will lead your children to improved compositions.

For more information on writing and other basic skills activities contact the Family Learning Association, 1-800-759-4723, and check the website: **www.kidscanlearn.com**.

Thank you for taking a strong interest in the education of your children.

The Family Learning Association

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

INDEX

apostrophes, 65-68, 80
contractions, 66, 70, 80
descriptive writing, 81-90
drafting, 5, 23-29,121
five W's, 19
freewriting, 10-12
grammar, 61-64, 70, 80
guidelines
  letters, 106
  literature, 118
  proofreading 79-80
  revising, 44
journals, 15-16, 22
letters, 91-106
  business, 97-105
  friendly, 92-96
lists, 13-14, 87
literature, 107-118
looping, 21
noun, 48, 61, 65
paragraph structure, 32-33
possessives, 65
prewriting, 5, 9-22, 147-149
pronouns, 48-49, 62-63, 69-70, 79-80
proofreading, 6, 45-80
publishing, 6
punctuation marks, 57-60, 69, 79, 111
quotation marks, 111, 125
revising, 6, 31-44, 118
sentence
  declarative, 50
  fragments, 55-56, 69, 79
  run-on, 52-54, 69, 79
  structure, 48-51, 69, 79
spelling, 45-48
statement, 50, 57
stories, 119-149
  historical fiction, 144
  imaginative, 129, 141
  narrative, 121, 147
  problem-solving, 147, 148
verb, 49-51, 55-56, 61, 66, 69-70, 79-80
worksheets
  descriptive writing, 90
  stories, 148

Improve your child's writing skills!

Show your children the writing process and you give them the key to constant improvement!

- ***How to get ideas***
- ***How to write a quick draft***
- ***Learn to rethink your writing***
- ***Writing a version for others to read***
- ***Look for praise***

Your child will follow guidelines that improve

- ***spelling***
- ***grammar***
- ***organization***
- ***descriptive writing***
- ***letter writing***
- ***writing narratives***
- ***writing fiction***

The many practical worksheets included give you and your child a thorough guide to improved writing, starting with early activity in the elementary grades.

Family Learning Association

ERIC®

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication

The Family Learning Association has many quality resources that aid families in accomplishing their educational goals.

For information, call or write:

The Family Learning Association
P.O. Box 5247
Bloomington, IN 47407
1-800-759-4723

E-mail us at **canlearn@bloomington.in.us**
or visit our Web site at **www.kidscanlearn.com**

BEST COPY AVAILABLE